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OUT OF STEP

A Novel

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BY

MARIA LOUISE POOL

AUTHOR OF

"THE TWO SALOMES" "MRS. KEATS BRADFORD"
"DALLY" "ROWENY IN BOSTON" ETC.



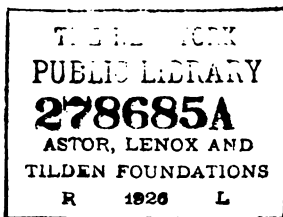
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NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1894

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NEW YORK CITY




By MARIA LOUISE POOL.

DALLY. MRS. KEATS BRADFORD.
ROWENY IN BOSTON. KATHARINE NORTH.
THE TWO SALOMES.

Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 25 each.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

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OUT OF STEP

I

IN MASSACHUSETTS AGAIN

THE girl came in somewhat breathless, but in spite of her red face and her flying hair there was an air of importance about her. She swung her bag of school-books on to the end of the kitchen table with a thump.

"I'll bet a dollar you can't guess what I know!" she exclaimed.

Her mother was kneading bread dough at the other end of the table. She paused in that operation to look admiringly at her daughter, who was sixteen and a bright light in the high-school in the village, two miles away. This daughter was not, however, in spite of her advancement in the teens, much burdened with dignity, for she leaned half her length on the table that she might reach a dish of dried apples which Mrs. Scudder had just been picking over. The girl put her white young teeth into a thick piece of the fruit; then she threw the bit across the room into the sink.

"I do believe," she cried, "that dried apple is the chew-
ingest thing on the face of the earth."

"You needn't waste them apples, if they be tough," said her mother, with more admiration than reproof in her manner.

"Oh, I guess we sha'n't fail if we do lose a few," responded the girl, sitting down and resting her arms on the

table. She glanced towards the dining-room where the table was set. "I do hope you've got something good for supper, and a lot of it. I'm as hungry as a thousand bears."

"We're goin' to have thickened toast 'n' rhubarb pie," her mother answered.

"Oh, goody! But I want a boiled egg with my toast. I tell you what, mother, a girl can't go to high-school and cram, and then walk two miles home without something to build up the tissues. She can't do it."

Cornelia, commonly called "Nely," gave her little school-girl laugh as she finished this speech. Her mother smiled more admiringly than ever.

"What be tissues?" she asked.

"Oh, something we have inside of us, and that have to be built up all the time," replied the girl.

"Is that so? We didn't have no tissues inside of us when I went to school," said Mrs. Scudder.

"Of course not. They were not invented then. But, I say, mother, you can't guess what I know," returning to her first remark.

"You're gittin' to know so many things, Nely, that I don't see how I can even give a guess," said the mother, with proud humility.

"Oh, 'tisin't anything I learned at school," disclaimed Nely, "but who do you s'pose is going to be our first assistant? Miss Riddle's got to go away. Now, who do you think's going to take her place?"

Mrs. Scudder paused in her painstaking working of the dough.

"Somebody I know?" she asked.

She was deeply interested, as she would have been in the most trifling thing her daughter could have mentioned, and she was grateful for any subject upon which she could talk, as are most women who live in the country, where a small topic is a godsend. She now wished to handle this affair leisurely and extract everything from it.

"Yes, indeed," was the answer. "You know her just as well as you know to pray."

"Nely!" exclaimed her mother, reprovingly.

But Nely had just read in school about how the Sultan went to Ispahan, and had been charmed with the verses; she was now charmed to quote them and to shock her mother at the same time.

"I guess it's Mr. Storer's daughter," now said Mrs. Scudder.

"It isn't. You're miles away," replied Nely, getting up and taking a drink from the cocoanut dipper in the water pail.

"Be you acquainted with the new assistant?" inquired her mother.

"I should say I was. And I've always been in love with her. But maybe she's changed."

"Changed?"

"Yes. She's been away more than a year. There! Now I've done it, and you know who it is, and I meant to make you guess a long time. I've a great mind to eat a seed-cake, I'm so hungry."

"I wouldn't; you'll spoil your supper. You don't mean S'lome Gerry?" hesitatingly.

"Yes; I do."

"Mercy sakes! But she's in Floridy."

"She's got home."

"But she's consumptive."

"You wouldn't say so if you saw her now. She doesn't look real tough, but she doesn't look sick."

"You don't mean to say you've seen her, Nely? I declare I'm jest 's interested 's I c'n be. I know they said she was gittin' well down there, but I never thought she'd come home alive. I'd no idea she would. She had a reg'lar hackin' cough jest like what Hatty Shields had, 'n' she went in quick consumption. You 'ain't seen her, have you?"

"Yes, I have. I saw her in the recitation-room right

after school. She came with one of the committee, and she saw the principal, and she's coming in next Monday, and I'm awfully glad. Mother, I do believe I will eat a seed-cake."

"It 'll spoil your supper, if you do. Supper 'll be ready in half an hour. I wish you'd git the bakin' pans 'n' grease 'um for this bread. I forgot it 'fore I got my hands in the dough."

Cornelia returned from the buttery with the long, shallow pans and the bowl of fat. She proceeded with great deliberation to apply this fat to the pans. Her mother presently took out handfuls of dough and pressed them into the baking dishes.

"Then you seen S'lome?" she repeated.

"Yes," said Nely, "and I like the looks of her better than I ever did. She has more in her face, somehow," said this wise person of sixteen.

"Did she speak to you?"

"Yes, she did. I kind of hung round, you know. Almost all the girls had gone, but when I saw her with Mr. East I thought I wouldn't hurry. So I was accidentally on the steps when she came out of the door. We looked at each other. I declare, mother, I do like her face. She was going right along, then she hesitated, and then she put out her hand.

"'Why, it's Nely Scudder,' she said. Then she kissed me, and I wanted to hug her, but I didn't; I just stood there, and finally I had wit enough to tell her I was glad she had come home; and was she better? She told me she was well now, and was going to be first assistant in place of Miss Riddle. When she said that I wanted to hug her again, for Miss Riddle is a stiff old thing, you know—"

"Nely!"

"I don't care; she is a stiff old thing; she must be thirty if she's a day, and I'm so tired of having her look at me and say, 'Miss Scudder, less frivolity, if you please.' I

don't really believe it would spoil my supper if I ate a seed-cake, mother. I'm absolutely starving."

"Eat one then. We'll set right down to the table in a few minutes. Ring the bell for your father to come in. Did S'lome say anything about her mother?"

"No."

"When'd they git home?"

"Day before yesterday. She said it was by good luck that she heard Miss Riddle was going, and as she must go to earning money right away, she thought she would apply for the position."

"Where be they goin' to live? The old Gerry place was sold to pay Lyman Gerry's debts after he died."

"I don't know where they are going to live. Of course, I didn't ask questions."

"Of course not. There's your father. You see to boiling your egg, 'n' I'll thicken the gravy for the toast. We'll set down in a minute."

While the family were at the supper table and Nely was actively engaged in supplying material for the purpose of building up her tissues, the talk was exclusively of the Gerry family—of the father who was dead, and the mother and daughter who were left. In the midst of this talk there was a knock at the back door.

Nely answered the summons and ushered in a slim, erect woman, dressed in the plainest black. She was a woman beyond middle age, with eyes somewhat sunken, but having a glance direct and strong and true. Her face was swarthy as if it had been tanned by being exposed to wind and sun. And it was a much-worn face also.

Mrs. Scudder rose from the table hurriedly, making a clatter of dishes as she did so. She went towards her visitor with both hands extended.

"I'm jes' 's glad to see you 's I can be!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mrs. Gerry, I sh'd think you'd ben gone ten years! How be ye now you have got back? Do set down. Nely's jest ben tellin' of seein' S'lome. How is S'lome?"

Mr. Scudder had risen also and now shook hands with extreme cordiality, and with a rotary motion that was somewhat hard on the joints of the receiver of his greeting. But Mrs. Gerry, who was deeply glad to see her old neighbors, bore this motion bravely. Her face lighted. Though her voice was steady as she replied, no one could have doubted her joy.

"Ain't you awful glad to git back?" asked Mrs. Scudder. "It always seemed to me as if Floridy was a dretful outlandish, shif'less kind of a place; ain't it?"

"'Tisn't much like New England, that's a fact," said Mrs. Gerry with emphasis.

"Set up 'n' have a cup of tea," urged Mr. Scudder, "and mar makes mighty good thickened toast," with a grin in the direction of his wife.

"Thank you, I had my supper at half-past five."

"Where be you stayin'?"

"At my brother's."

"Of course. I knew your home was all broke up," sympathetically. "Is S'lome really better?"

"I think she's well," was the reply.

"And it cured her jest stayin' there in Floridy?"

"Yes. You know the climate is very different."

"I s'pose so. But I don't see how jest climate c'n do so much. It don't seem 's if it could."

"Why, mother!" exclaimed the high-school girl, shocked at her parent's ignorance, "don't you know that climate is one of the most powerful influences for good or evil on the human being?"

Mrs. Scudder laughed and said, "Oh, sho, now, Nely!" but she glanced proudly at her guest, who was looking smilingly at the girl.

"Salome was just telling me, Nely," said Mrs. Gerry, "that she was glad you were to be one of the pupils at the high-school."

"Oh, did she say that?" Nely's face flushed with delight.

"Yes, indeed." Mrs. Gerry turned to Nely's father. She told him she had called now to ask about that little house he owned at the Ledge. She had heard it was vacant. It was only half a mile from the school where Salome would teach. She must hire a place to live in, and she thought that would be low-priced.

"It's dretful out of the way, Mis' Gerry," Mrs. Scudder hastened to state; "I'm afraid you'll be awful lonesome there."

"I'm used to being out of the way," replied Mrs. Gerry, "since I've been in Florida. I sha'n't mind that. Besides, a place in the village would cost too much."

"Do you really mean that you want to hire that Ledge house?"

It was Mr. Scudder who put this question.

Mrs. Gerry repeated her request for it. In a few moments more she had engaged it. She rose to go. When urged to stay longer she explained that Salome had said that she should start out to meet her, and she did not want the child, who had had rather a tiresome day, to come too far.

"You still have to be ca'ful of her then?" inquired Mrs. Scudder.

"I've fallen into that habit," was the answer, "but really, Salome is well. Do come and see us when we get settled, all of you."

There was a little more talk, and then Mrs. Gerry was walking down the road, and all of the Scudders were looking at her as she went.

"She looks ten years older," exclaimed Mrs. Scudder. "I declare I never seen nothin' beat it. That must be a terrible climate in Floridy. I wonder how Salome looks. I s'pose her mother would have stayed there if it killed her if she thought 'twas good for the girl."

"Salome looks changed," said Nely, returning to the table for one more seed-cake. "But she's more interesting than ever. I just wish I could go to Florida!"

"'Tain't likely you ever will," remarked her mother, comfortably. "Mebby 'tain't all climate that's changed S'lome. Mebby she's ben disappointed down there."

"Disappointed?" repeated Nely, questioningly. She had not yet learned that this word when applied to a girl refers solely to the question of love for a man. To say that such a woman must have been disappointed means that a lover must have proved false to her.

"Yes," said Mrs. Scudder. "P'rhaps she had a beau down therē, 'n' he got sick of her. I d' know's you c'n tell much by them Southern men."

"Pooh!" cried Nely, scornfully. "It must be a mighty poor kind of a beau that would get sick of Salome Gerry. I don't believe any such thing."

"But you don't know 'bout them Southern men," went on Mrs. Scudder, somewhat reflectively. Then she looked up suddenly. "Walter Redd went down there. Did he say nothing 'bout any beau of S'lome's?"

"I guess not. You wouldn't catch Walter Redd saying much any way. He's awful gone on her himself."

With this classic remark Nely began to put on an all-enveloping 'tire preparatory to washing the supper dishes.

During the process of clearing up after the evening meal the two women kept up a desultory talk concerning the Gerrys; and even after the two were sitting by the lamp, the elder knitting and the younger with her school-books, the subject had not lost its interest. Mrs. Scudder clung to the idea of Salome's disappointment, and Nely persisted in scouting that idea.

Long before the lingering twilight had given place to evening Mrs. Gerry was again at her brother's. When she had left Mr. Scudder's she had walked quickly down the road, hardly glancing to the right or left, but feeling to the bottom of her heart the beauty of the hills and dales that rose and fell about her, all green with the lovely green of the new summer time, all so different, so utterly different from that level stretch of Florida land which she had hated. Yes,

now that she was away from it, Mrs. Gerry dared to acknowledge to herself that she hated Florida. She wished to forget the hot days of that summer; the long hours of unblinking sunshine; the white, scorching sand; the trees with thick, glossy leaves; the gloomy gray moss swinging forever from the live-oaks. The ocean was all that had been endurable; she had borne that by thinking that it was the same ocean which washed against the New England coast.

The woman paused in her quick walk when she had reached the top of a long hill. From this hill she saw the roof and the chimneys of the old Gerry place, where her husband had died more than a year ago. The place was sold now. Lyman Gerry had been in debt. Well, the debts were paid, and the sweet-natured, improvident man had paid the last great debt. His widow stood motionless, looking at the house which had been her home for so many years. She was a woman whose soul revolted against change, who longed for the things which had once been hers, just because they had been hers. She struck deep roots down into her native soil. But those roots had been ruthlessly pulled up, or rather, she herself had pulled them up, because she thought she ought. She believed that a person could do whatever was right. That is, for herself she believed it. For Salome—Mrs. Gerry's whole figure underwent some subtle change at the thought of her daughter. Not that she made any movement. She was thinking that she might have been intolerant if Salome had been like the Wares, for instance. The Wares were always "right there;" you knew where to find them; their position was as well defined as the edges of a block of granite. But Salome—

An ineffable tenderness came into the sunken eyes: still the features of the face did not relax or change in any other way.

Mrs. Gerry turned and looked across a pasture that lay between her and her brother's house. At the far side of it, in the open space where the young oaks did not grow, was

a girl walking slowly. The woman could just see that this girl was swinging her hat in her hand. The glow from the red west was on that open space of pasture and on the slender figure. The birds were flying this way and that over the girl, giving out their blithe twilight songs. Somewhere far at the right a whippoorwill had begun to sing, melancholy and listant.

Until now Mrs. Gerry had thought she liked a whippoorwill's cry. Now she heard it with Salome's ears, and wondered if the sound would depress her daughter. Salome took such notice of everything, and she was so queer about some things. But then she was well, perfectly well. Her mother could not be too grateful for that.

So intently did she watch that form that she did not see another figure coming up the hill towards her by the road. Just as Salome waved her hat to her mother, a young man joined Mrs. Gerry.

"I'm real glad to see you," he said. "I only just heard you had come. I was going to get round and call this evening."

While he was speaking Walter Redd was holding Mrs. Gerry's hand. In a moment she put her other hand over the large, brown, well-shaped fingers. The gesture meant much with the undemonstrative woman.

"I hope you will come," she answered.

She paused before she spoke again. The sight of Redd's dark, controlled face affected her strangely. He seemed so large and strong that all at once she felt weak and unnerved. But she did not look unnerved. One might almost have said that she was cold. A strenuous effort towards composure so often gives a cold aspect.

"Florida doesn't agree with you, Mrs. Gerry," said Redd. "I didn't like it myself very well when I was there. But there are plenty who do like it. Let's see, you've been there more than a year, haven't you?"

"Yes; we went the fall before last, you know. We stayed all that year, and so much into this."

"I should think the summer must be dreadful there," remarked Redd.

Though he looked so calm, the young man hardly knew what he was saying. His eyes, roving about, had now seen that approaching figure in the pasture.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gerry, "the summer was dreadful. Day after day it was like being in an oven. The sun was like—"

Here she paused as if under the influence of something she could not resist.

"Walter," she said in a whisper, as though some one might overhear her, "haven't you got over it any? I hoped you would get over it long before this. Men are so different from women about such things."

"Got over it!" repeated the man. "I don't know how different men are, I'm sure. But I never shall get over it. There she is coming now."

Redd's features set themselves hardly. Still looking at the distant Salome, he asked:

"Where is Moore?"

"I don't know."

"What? Don't you know anything about him?"

"No."

"I didn't think he was like that," said Redd, with an accent of savageness. "I liked him. I couldn't help liking him."

"You needn't blame Mr. Moore," quickly replied Mrs. Gerry. "He did all he could. He was broken-hearted. But Salome held out. She said she thought it was for his good that she shouldn't be his wife. She said she hoped she could do anything for his good; but that she didn't care what became of her. Well," again came that pause in Mrs. Gerry's speech, "she held out then. Sometimes I don't know what she would do now. We don't talk of that time."

"It must have been something of great weight. I am not asking what it was, Mrs. Gerry, that could make Salome take such a stand."

Redd still watched the girl.

"Yes, it was of great weight," was the answer.

"Perhaps in time the obstacles will be removed."

"No," replied the woman. Then somewhat hurriedly:
"Walter, I know what you are thinking. But don't fix your mind upon any such thing."

Redd did not reply. He was now perfectly calm in appearance. He left Mrs. Gerry and walked with his deliberate, masterful kind of movement towards the road-side fence.

Salome had nearly reached the fence. Her thin, sensitive face lighted with pleasure. She hastened. She took Redd's offered hand, and he almost lifted her over into the highway.

"How good it is to see you, Walter!" she exclaimed.

Her voice rang clear and steady; her eyes shone. The delicate pallor of her face had been browned over by the Florida sun and wind; but no flush rose beneath the tan. She did not color now any more than when Miss Nunally had asked her why she never blushed.

"I hope you're glad to get home, Salome," said Redd.

She smiled.

"It was time for me to come home," she answered, "and I am glad, any way," correcting herself, "I'm glad on mother's account. Poor mother!" putting her hand through Mrs. Gerry's arm, "she doesn't love the South. She's a Yankee: aren't you, mother? A Yankee of the Yankees."

"And pray what are you, Salome?" asked Redd.

"I?" laughing. "I'm one of those lizards that come out and bask in the sun. You mustn't tell me that lizards don't have their uses, Walter."

But Redd had no sympathy with this kind of talk. He hardly knew what it meant. He thought Salome seemed older. She ought not to seem older in less than two years. He must acknowledge that she looked in good health; not red, aggressive health, of course. He glanced away from her over the fields. Her face was just as sen-

sitive, only the lines were strengthened somehow by firmer health.

Redd felt that she was far away from him. But how friendly she was! How many times he had asked himself if he should ever see her again. He had given up thinking he should ever see her, and here she was standing beside him talking to him in the voice he remembered. He wondered why, now that he was with her once more, the time since he had met her should seem even longer than it had done.

"I'm going to settle down and be of some use in the world," said Salome. "I'm going to take care of my mother now," glancing as she spoke at her mother. "She has always had lurking fears that I was not practical. I'm going to prove to her that she has been wrong."

Redd's eyes were on the elder woman as he asked:

"What is she going to do?" But it was the girl who answered:

"I'm first assistant at the high-school. I take Miss Riddle's place. I'm useful. I support my mother. I hold my head up in the world."

"I never noticed as you held your head down," responded Redd. He tried to say something about how rejoiced he was that she had regained her health. He thought he said it very awkwardly. When he had finished speaking the two women moved forward, wishing him good-night with hearty cordiality.

The young man kept along the upper road, his hands deep in his pockets, his head bent. At a curve he paused and looked back. As he gazed his face hardened more and more. If he had been a man who ever talked to himself, he would now have said aloud:

"Walter Redd, I didn't know you were such a fool."

But he did not speak. Presently he was round the corner and could not see the two women any more. Presently, also, the red faded from the sky, and a mist rose from all the low places where the frogs were peeping.

"It is like the frogs in the moat at Augustine," said Sa-

lome. "How warm it must be down there now! And do you suppose it is Mrs. Job Maine's day for 'thur shakes'?"

The girl laughed, and her mother laughed in response. They were very cheerful. And they soon fell to talking about the high-school, and Salome said she must furbish up her mathematics; she was never strong in mathematics.

"I hope you won't get too tired," said Mrs. Gerry. "You are not used to being shut up in a room all day."

"Oh, I sha'n't get too tired," was the reply. "There's lots of work in me. It's time I was beginning it; don't you think so, mother?"—catching her mother's glance—"you needn't worry one bit about me. I long to work; and I'm tough," laughing again; "I'm what they call 'tough as a knot.' It's going to be your turn to take things easy now. I shall bring my wages to you, and you will save them. I shall have fifty dollars a month, you know. How much do you think it will cost us to live—to be fairly comfortable? I needn't have beefsteak very often in these days. I'm well."

The girl straightened her slender figure. "What's good enough for you is good enough for me."

She turned towards her mother, and suddenly drew her mother's hand through her arm. Mrs. Gerry could not help smiling at the thrifty calculation as to ways and means.

"How much do you think it will cost us to live?" repeated the girl.

"The rent will be four dollars a month," was the reply. "Twenty-five dollars ought to cover everything. But your clothes—"

"I don't mean they shall be anything at present. Be thankful I am not vain, mother. Then we can save the rest of my salary towards what I owe Mrs. Darrah."

"Yes, that is what I was thinking. In two years, if we are well, with what I can help, she will be paid."

Mrs. Gerry spoke with a kind of unconscious solemnity. The two women walked on in silence for a few moments. The farm-house to which they were going now stood before

them, looking black against the pale light of the west. There had come a chill in the air, though the day had been warm.

"I wish you had worn your shawl," said Mrs. Gerry, anxiously. "Let us hurry."

"I am not cold; and I don't want to hurry," responded the girl. She held her mother back a little, hesitating before she said, "I suppose you are very anxious about that debt, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I knew that very well." Then Salome continued, in a light tone, "but we needn't worry in the least. Mrs. Darrah has so much money that even Portia Nunally could not spend it nearly all. There'll be no harm done if I never pay it."

"Salome!"

"No," repeated the younger woman, with a persistent disregard, "not the least harm. I'm not going to lie awake o' nights thinking of that."

"Certainly you need not lie awake nights," said Mrs. Gerry, patiently, "but we'll save all we can. It is a just debt. And Mrs. Darrah has been kind. It is a just debt." A trifle of hardness came into the speaker's voice as she spoke those words a second time.

Salome gazed at her companion through the gathering dusk. Then she said, still lightly:

"Oh yes, I know it is just. But how unlovely justice is! Mother, I hate justice!"

Mrs. Gerry made no answer. The two walked quickly up the path towards the door of the house.

The next moment Salome was seized upon by the three-year-old son of the family, who had been allowed to sit up for her return. The two were instantly in the gayest of frolics. Salome's laughter and song sounded through the rooms.

Mrs. Gerry and her sister-in-law sat talking in a desultory fashion about what should be put into the house at the Ledge.

The brother's wife was going to lend some old furniture which had been her father's, and which was now in the attic.

"What good company S'lome is!" exclaimed the hostess. "I do b'lieve my childrun 'd soon love her's well's they do me. She's real well now, ain't she?"

"Yes."

"I'm awful glad. But somehow I sh'd be kinder 'fraid if she was mine to have her in such good spirits. Jest hear her!" as the child's laugh and the girl's laugh rang out from the bedroom where it was supposed that the boy was being put to bed.

"I'm sure I don't mean to worry because Salome is in good spirits," answered Mrs. Gerry. "There's worry enough in the world without going to meet it in that way."

"Mebby there is," with a shake of the head; "but I'm always anxious when folks seem too happy."

The speaker paused with the air of having something more to say. "I have heard," she went on, "that S'lome's ben disappointed sence she went South. Would you jest as lieves tell me if there was any young man payin' attention to her down there?"

Mrs. Gerry could not help hesitating an instant. She resented the question; but she must meet it in some way.

"It wasn't a place," she said, finally, "where we should be likely to meet young men. Why, it was the lonesomest, most God-forsaken spot you can imagine."

"Odd S'lome liked it, wasn't it?"

"She was getting well all the time, you know," was the answer.

"That does make a difference. I remember when Robert was gittin' up from that fever—"

And now the woman was well started on a long retrospect; Mrs. Gerry yielded to a sense of relief. But she could not forget that remark about her daughter's having been "disappointed" in Florida. Who could have said such a thing as that? Who could possibly know anything of what had happened there? Although Mrs. Gerry was not a

woman of impulse, yet she was conscious now of an impulse to go away to some place where she and her daughter were not known. But all through those long, those interminable months in the South, she had hoped and waited for the time to come when she could return to her native town. She desired with intensity that she might dwell among those rocky pastures, under that sky. There had hardly been an hour when she had not fought against homesickness. The very balm of the air "went against her," as she would have said. She wished for that east wind which sweeps savagely in from the coast.

Still Mrs. Gerry would not have acknowledged that she felt such a longing. She considered it a weakness which she must fight down.

Salome often said that her mother's idea of being good was to fight some tendency all the time. If she did not readily find a tendency, a little self-analysis would be sure to reveal one. But she said this smilingly, and hanging tenderly about her mother.

Now as Mrs. Gerry thought of what her sister-in-law had said, and heard Salome's gay voice, she wanted to put her hand to her head as if such a gesture would help her to think clearly.

It certainly was very confusing to live with Salome. It certainly tended to upset many of the elder woman's life-long theories. Mrs. Gerry knew that her theories must be right. They were right. They admitted of no different interpretation from what she had always given them. Truth and self-denial. To tell and live the truth; and to sacrifice one's self.

A sudden quiet had come upon the occupants of the adjoining bedroom. The only sound now heard was the droning sound of the voice of the woman who was telling how Robert was when getting up from his fever.

Mrs. Gerry saw her daughter's figure appear noiselessly in the doorway. The girl held up her finger and glanced back, smiling.

The story of how Robert got up from his fever suddenly ceased.

"Is Benny asleep?" asked Benny's mother.

Salome nodded.

"Well," said Benny's mother, "mebby he'll let you play with him again to-morrow."

Salome said in that case she would try to wait until to-morrow. She came forward and sat down in a large chair, leaning back in it and stretching out her feet in a way that her hostess believed to be graceful, but also dimly felt to be in some manner not exactly the position for a girl to take. She thought vaguely that "mebby it was unlady-like." She told herself that she had "kinder forgotten that S'lome Gerry was jes' 's she was. She was a real nice girl, 'n' you was drawed to her some way. There was Benny now"—remembering how Benny had screamed a few hours before because Salome had not come as soon as he had expected her. And when the mother thought of Benny's devotion, she forgave Salome for not sitting upright in a chair as the feminine human being ought.

The woman looked narrowly at the girl that she might decide if she saw signs of her guest having been "disappointed." It seemed to her that if a girl were disappointed she must bear a distinct and unmistakable sign of it somewhere upon her. She did not know precisely what this sign was, still she thought she should know it if she saw it.

Salome's face and head were well defined against the shabby dark covering of the chair; and the kerosene lamp stood on the table at the other side of her.

As a girl who had been to Florida for her health and had come back cured she would be interesting, though it was very difficult for one to believe that merely staying in Florida would cure anybody "without medicine nor nothing." If it had been bitters now—but Salome must be odd indeed to be cured "jest by climate."

"Be you asleep, S'lome?" asked the woman.

"No," said Salome, without opening her eyes.

"I was goin' to tell you that my husband heard, when he went to mill this mornin', that Walter Redd was shinin' up to Mr. Leech's second daughter. Walter used to be one of your beaus, didn't he, S'lome?"

"I could almost say that he used to be my only beau," Salome replied, still without changing her position or opening her eyes.

The woman laughed a little. She kept a close watch on the girl.

"I hope you ain't goin' to feel bad if he should marry Sarah Leech," she remarked. "Sarah 'll have as much as two thousand dollars if she outlives her aunt Sarah, I expect. I guess Walter wouldn't be sorry if his wife had some money."

"He ought to be glad," responded Salome.

In the pause that followed these words, Mrs. Gerry felt again the stirring of that wish that she and her daughter had not come back to a place where they were known. She wondered how Salome was feeling about this questioning, which was presently resumed.

"I s'pose you knew lots of fellers when you was in Floridy, didn't you?" was the next inquiry.

Mrs. Gerry turned her face away that she might not appear to be listening. She knew that their hostess was now in pursuit of some clew to the "disappointment."

In these days the mother did not quite know what to expect of her daughter. There were times when the two almost seemed strangers to each other, so alien were their moods.

Salome now opened her eyes and turned them towards her interlocutor.

"It was a very lonesome place," she said. "We really knew only two men while we were there. What is it that you want to know? If you will only ask me point-blank, why—perhaps I'll answer you," with a laugh.

Benny's mother drew herself up somewhat at this. She said she didn't know as she was one that ever wanted to

pry into other folks's business; but bein' connected with the Gerrys so, she had been arst things that, if she knew, mebbyshe could stop folks's mouths.

"There isn't the least necessity for stopping folks's mouths," said Salome; "let them remain gaping and unfilled."

The woman stared for a moment in angry perplexity. It was a fresh grievance that Salome should answer in that way, and dimly she was aware of a sense of thunder. Salome rose slowly. She stretched her arms above her head. She had always, but now more than ever, a kind of freedom and spontaneity of bodily movement that resembled the movement of a graceful animal.

"Mother, I am so sleepy," she said.

The two went up-stairs to the room they occupied together. When the door had closed upon them the girl turned and grasped her companion's arm. Her eyes shone, but her voice did not accord with her glance as she asked:

"What was she talking about?"

"I don't know. She was inquisitive. You know how they are here," answered Mrs. Gerry.

"Yes, oh yes, I know. And you like to be among such people, mother. They are your kind, in a way; but as for me"—the girl put the palms of her hands together with a suggestion of violence—"I hate them."

When she had spoken thus, Salome evidently tried to control herself.

"Does Job Maine suit you better?" inquired Mrs. Gerry.

But Salome did not answer. She had gone to the window and had thrown up the sash. She leaned out, inhaling the cool, damp air of the night. There was a heavy scent of rank green leaves in the air, and the same whippoorwill, the girl thought, that had sung when she was a child, was again singing in the bushes across the road.

"Mother," said Salome, after a while, "something happened to me to-day."

As she spoke with her head out of the window Mrs.

Gerry did not hear distinctly at first, and the words had to be repeated. But Salome still leaned there in the same position. Her mother sat down quickly. She wished that she could cease being so much on the alert all the time.

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope," she said, calmly.

"That's just as you take it," replied Salome. She came back into the room and closed the window. She put her cold hands on her mother's arm.

"It happened to me that I wrote a letter to—are you listening, mother?—to Mr. Moore."

II

EXPECTING

MRS. GERRY's instant and involuntary effort towards self-restraint was so far successful that she was able to say "Indeed!" in her usual tone, and as if Salome's writing to Mr. Moore were much the same as her writing to an ordinary acquaintance.

In the silence that followed the whippoorwill's note sounded stridently melancholy.

Salome clasped her hands over her head and walked about the room.

"Do you think I was wrong?" she asked, at last.

"It is a year since you have heard from him?" was the counter question.

"A year and two days."

"A man's heart may change so in a year," said Mrs. Gerry.

"I thought of that—I thought of that!" exclaimed Salome, her voice suddenly thrilling on the words, "but he said he should not change. He said—oh, mother! I cannot tell you what he said that last time when he came to Augustine. You have been thinking I had forgotten; that I was adjusting myself to circumstances. Haven't you been thinking that, mother?"

"Sometimes. I am sure I have been hoping that you had adjusted yourself to circumstances," was the earnest reply.

"According to you," exclaimed Salome, "that is all that life is; that horrible adjustment. Now I—I—" She started again to walk across the room. Her face was so pale that

the glow upon it had a spiritual aspect. "I am not going to adjust myself. I am going to live. I've been trying your way all these months. Haven't I been good? To be good, you know, mother, is to be ice, stone, iron—all those things from which a heart of flesh revolts. To-day something snapped. I was glad. I was sitting at that desk in the school-house where I am to work. There were ink and paper there. I wrote a line to Mr. Moore. I addressed it to the firm. He said he could always hear, wherever he was, in that way. When I left the place I mailed the letter. It has gone by this time. It may be in his hands by to-morrow morning; or he may be travelling."

Salome's words came so fast that she appeared breathless when she had finished speaking.

She seemed to radiate hope and eager life.

Mrs. Gerry sat in entire contrast to her daughter. Her motionless position was in itself something like a reproof.

"What did you write?" she asked.

"Oh, I did not need to write much. I simply said that I had changed my mind. That was all."

"But why have you changed your mind?" was the inexorable question.

"Why? Good heavens! Mother, why do we choose happiness rather than misery?"

The girl stood gazing at the figure sitting in the chair. "As for me," she went on, quickly, "I think I have borne it a good while; don't you think so, mother?"

Mrs. Gerry leaned forward and took her daughter's hand, attempting to draw the girl down into her arms. But Salome resisted, explaining that she must move, must walk, that she could not keep still.

Mrs. Gerry did not lose sight of the main point.

"But nothing is altered since you would not listen to him," she said; "all is just as it was. You are the same girl. Nothing can be altered, from the very nature of things. Why did you go through this year of suffering? Why did

you make Mr. Moore suffer, since now you change your mind?"

"Oh, how reasonable you are, mother!" cried Salome, "and what a thing it is to be reasonable! But I have had enough of it. I have had more than twelve months stuffed full of pure reasonableness. I have lain down and risen up in reason, and supped and drank reason. Mother, I let myself be alive again. And to be alive is to love Randolph Moore so much that, like you, I regret my year of being conscientious. What a foolish thing it is to be conscientious! I have lost all those weeks and months out of my life just by that making believe to have a conscience. I give it all up. Who was that girl who had a soul when she began to love, or did she cease to have a soul as soon as she loved? It makes no difference. Oh, mother! Do you think he will come soon? Do you remember his face as I do? The look in his eyes? You always liked him. Bless you for that! But who could help liking him? I hope he will get my note directly. I hope he is not away. Now I have written, I wonder so much that I did not write long ago. Oh, mother!"

As that last cry left her lips Salome sank down on her knees by her mother's side, and pressed her face into the folds of her mother's gown. She began to sob in that violent, reckless fashion which reveals how intolerable has been a previous restraint.

Mrs. Gerry bent over and encircled the girl in her arms, not saying anything, only making an inarticulate murmur of endearment and soothing.

What she was thinking was that it had all been for nothing—worse than nothing. And Salome must have suffered even more than the mother had guessed.

The elder woman was tempted to warn the girl to be ready for any changes that a year might have made in Moore. And Moore had been sent away at the last with absolutely no hope, so far as he could gather hope from anything Salome had said. She had been on a pinnacle of

resolve and sacrifice. Rather than endanger the happiness of her lover she persisted. And she had some kind of an idea that suffering would atone for that crime of forgery. Not that she could bring home to herself any sense of repentance. But to suffer might atone ; to suffer deeply and continuously. How should she know that suffering never atoned, that nothing atones for the past ?

At last Salome looked up. She pressed her hair back with both hands.

"Now that I have written," she said, "I know that every minute I have lived since I saw him was only a minute that was leading up to the time when I must write. If you love, nothing else seems worth while, mother."

The pale, sensitive face was so charged with emotion that Mrs. Gerry, looking down at it, had a recurrence of the old sharp anxiety concerning her daughter's physical welfare. She did not speak, for she was afraid that she could not command her voice.

In spite of her penetrative love, Mrs. Gerry had not suspected how liable Salome was to this outbreak. She had come to believe that the girl had been calm, or at least that she was becoming calm ; "reconciled" was the word Mrs. Gerry used in thinking of the matter. It seemed to her that she was thinking of the subject continually. Sometimes she felt that her judgment was no longer reliable. She sat there now with her hands on her daughter's shoulders, feeling as if she were brought face to face afresh with a difficulty with which she could not grapple.

It was a new thing for Mrs. Gerry to feel helpless. She sat silent, grave, not trying to respond in words to anything Salome had said. She foresaw suffering and trouble. But she knew that the girl was looking forward now to happiness—looking forward inconsistently, groundlessly, the mother thought.

"Haven't you anything to say to me, mother?" Salome asked this after the silence had continued for many moments. "You think that I ought not to have written."

Mrs. Gerry sat upright.

"I think that you are a human being, and must take matters into your own hands. It seems to me that you sent Mr. Moore away under the same conditions which are in force now that you recall him."

Salome flung out her hands. "Yes, yes!" she exclaimed. "But I can bear it no longer. I have been too scrupulous. I said to myself I would be a New-England girl. I would act like your daughter. But I give all that up"—another gesture of the hands—"yes, I am going to do with my life as I will, as you say. I thrust the past behind me. He knows what I am—what I have done. He begged me to let him know if I changed my mind. But I told him he must expect nothing—nothing."

"Salome, listen to me," said Mrs. Gerry, with a compelling emphasis in her voice; "when a man absolutely expects nothing, he gives up hoping—he looks elsewhere."

"What is that you are saying?"

Salome had risen. She now turned quickly as she spoke, and there was a shrillness in her tones.

"Oh, my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Gerry, "don't hope too much."

"But I cannot hope too much. When Mr. Moore came that last time to see me I knew his heart, his very heart. Oh no, I cannot hope too much."

Mrs. Gerry's lips closed in a way that showed that she would say no more.

Salome continued moving about the room in a restless manner, her face glowing, her eyes dilated and full of light. At last she was ready for bed. But she did not think of sleeping. She put her hand under her cheek and lay looking out into the dusk of the summer night, listening with far-away thoughts to the sounds made by the insects.

She was following her letter to Moore, going every step of the way with it until the moment when it came into the young man's hands. She saw him read it—the one line which was all she had written; she imagined the look

which would come into his face — she knew his face so well. How ignorant her mother was to think it necessary to warn her against disappointment! Did she not know Randolph Moore better than any one else could possibly know him?

She and her mother were very busy during the next few days trying to get settled in the little house they had hired. Salome worked like one for whom everything was glorified. She kept count of the hours with eager accuracy.

When the time came that her letter should reach Moore, the subtle excitement upon her was almost unbearable. But she kept telling herself that he might be away—he was travelling so much.

"S'lome simps to be a good deal more facultied 'n she used to be, somehow," remarked Mrs. Scudder to Mrs. Gerry, as the two women were laying a straw matting in the very small south chamber of the Ledge house.

Both Mrs. Scudder and her daughter Nely were giving up a day to helping the Gerrys to get settled in their new home. This was done at Nely's instigation, and the school-girl was at this moment scrubbing the kitchen floor, and occasionally lifting herself upright on her knees to look at Salome, who was washing a window in the same room.

Suddenly Nely gave a short laugh. Salome turned with a question in her movement.

"Ain't it funny?" exclaimed Nely, and she went on laughing. Then in a moment she continued: "To think that anybody should ever say you'd been disappointed, Salome Gerry. If 'twas any other girl in the world I shouldn't think it so strange."

"I've just as good a right to be disappointed as any one," was the response. And then Salome's laugh was joined to her companion's.

"Jest hear um," said Mrs. Scudder, on the floor above. And she added that it really did seem wonderful that Salome could wash winders jest like any other girl. 'N' she had as much faculty about it as she, Mrs. Scudder, had herself.

"She even borrowed my wooden skewer 't I saved from our last roastin' piece of meat, to dig out the corners with. Now, I do think it's a mighty good sign as to what kind of a house-keeper you be, if you use them wooden skewers to dig out corners in winder-sashes. There ain't nothin' like them skewers. They go into the corners, 'n' yet they don't scratch. I ain't a mite afraid to use um on my parlor winders. Yes," reflectively pausing, with a hammer in her hand, "skewers is a real good sign."

Mrs. Gerry was measuring round a beam and trying to fit the matting. She remarked explanatorily that Salome's having been sick so much when she was growing up had made a difference in her knowing how to do things. But she had always been willing to work. "I don't know what I should have done without her."

Mrs. Gerry's firm voice was not quite so firm in this sentence. She was thinking of the heartaches and the anxieties her daughter had brought her, and that she could bear them all for the sake of the love Salome showed her.

"Of course you don't," responded Mrs. Scudder's gentle, comforting tones. "I do believe this matten' 's goin' to run short somehow. If there is a bare place, le's have it under the bed. Jest hear Nely go on," as Nely's laugh sounded up the open stairway. "She's jest kinder bewitched with your S'lome. I do believe she'd do anything in the world for her."

Hearing those words, Mrs. Gerry suddenly paused in her work. She turned her face aside, lest there should be some visible change upon it.

She had not thought of that—of Salome's influence. How strange that she had not thought of that! And the girl was to be assistant at the high-school, and be associated with young people who would look up to her more or less. That personal charm which belonged to her daughter would have its effect. But underlying that charm there should be what Mrs. Gerry had always called "principle." There was nothing else really worth while. And Salome

had not principle. She had tenderness, kindness, love, a strong individual attraction. This latter her mother could not feel as others might feel it.

Mrs. Gerry rose to her feet, leaving the matting unfitted. She did not know why she rose. She only knew that she was possessed with a desire to hinder in some way something which Salome might do if she were with young people. How long would it be before Nely Scudder, for instance, began to suspect that Salome did not have the necessary regard for the truth for its own sake? Not that Salome ever told glaring lies, or not often. But she would sometimes slide over things in what seemed to her mother the most unaccountable, reprehensible way. Not to shield herself, but to make things pleasanter.

Not until this moment had Mrs. Gerry realized the terrifying fact that she herself was becoming less and less horrified by this proclivity of Salome's. Living day after day with one so dear to her as this only child, with one so lovable and so winning, the enormity of the way Salome had of dealing with truth did not impress her with such insistently vital force as it ought.

The mother was sure of that now. She ought not to have allowed Salome to take that position at the high-school. It was true that she had not been consulted by her daughter, who had acted suddenly and hurriedly in the matter.

Mrs. Gerry's conscience sprang up alert and alarmed.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Scudder, looking up and speaking with a tack in her mouth. "Did you pound your thumb? I 'most always pound my thumb 'fore I git a carpet down, though mattin' ain't so hard on thumbs quite."

Mrs. Gerry immediately crouched again into position to resume her work. She said that she had been thus far saved from pounding herself. And she explained no further.

Below-stairs, while Salome twisted her cleaning-cloth about the point of her skewer, Nely again asked her com-

panion if she ever really had been disappointed. In Nely's eyes to be disappointed must be an experience which, though perhaps painful, must still be something to distinguish one for all one's remaining life. Next to a prosperous love an unprosperous love would be the thing to know.

"And did you really have a beau down there in Florida, Salome?"

The elder girl flashed a quick look at Nely, who was sitting back on her heels with her mop dripping in her hands.

"It isn't good taste to talk about one's lovers—not that I had lovers," answered Salome.

"Oh, dear!" cried Nely, slapping her mop on the floor. "But I do wish you'd tell me if you were crossed in love. Sometimes I just almost wish I could be crossed in love. It must make one feel so important. Don't you think so? To be 'round with a long face, you know, and go into corners and weep; and to pine away just as if you were eating slate-pencils and cloves, but knowing all the time it wasn't slate-pencils and cloves, but only just love. I declare, it must be splendid. Only just before I really died I should want to take a turn and get well, and curl up my lip in scorn when my beau came crawling after me to make it all up. I should certainly want him to come crawling on his marrow-bones finally, so I could scorn him. Oh, wouldn't it be fun!"

Nely bent over, and began scrubbing with great force. She had a very uncertain feeling as to whether Salome had been crossed in love or not. She thought not, however, for she could not conceive that any young man should not be willing to give his eyes for her favor.

The house-cleaning below-stairs went on with unnecessary fury for some time.

Above, the matting was at last spread with an accompaniment of gentle, amiable talk on Mrs. Scudder's, and a serious silence on Mrs. Gerry's part.

On the following Monday, Salome went to her school duties. She gayly kissed her mother, who followed her into

the dooryard, and watched her walking away with that swift, easy gait which was characteristic of her, now she was well.

Since Moore had not come immediately, Salome knew that he was on one of his business trips, and she could not know when to expect him—or, rather, she could not help expecting him all the time. But she said nothing more about him. She went every morning down the solitary high-road towards the village. And her mother said nothing. She could not help going to the end of the garden which overlooked the steep hill along which her daughter descended on her way to her work. She would watch the girl there, furtively watch, lest Salome might turn round and see her, and imagine that she was anxious.

And as the days went on until they became weeks, Mrs. Gerry became so anxious that she hardly dared to look fully at the girl's face. There grew up a significant silence between the two—a silence on all topics but the most trivial ones. They would talk for many minutes on the advisability of having eggs or corned-beef for dinner the next day, or whether Salome should take her umbrella or not. And when a friend from the old neighborhood toiled up the hill to see them, the visit was material for almost never-ending conversation.

Mrs. Gerry's forehead had a deep line down the middle of it. But there was no line on the girl's forehead. She grew serious of face, and there came a thoughtful, wondering droop to the corners of her mouth. And the clear paleness of her skin increased. She conversed a good deal about her pupils and the characteristics of a few to whom she felt attached. She studied algebra in the little time there was after the lamp was lighted, when the long twilight was over. She continued to be amiable. She looked openly at her mother, but her mother avoided her glance as if she had something to conceal.

A bitterness began to grow in Mrs. Gerry's heart. Self-controlled as she had tried to be all her life, she found it

now strangely difficult for her to maintain her usual manner. When her daughter was at school Mrs. Gerry had times in the day when she would walk swiftly along the road in the direction of the railway station, two miles distant. She would walk until she came to where the road turned, and she would stand there looking along the highway, her eyes contracting, the frown on her forehead deepening. If she saw any of the townspeople approaching she would walk on in her ordinary prim, straight manner. But when she was alone she allowed her face to settle directly into that expression of bitter, painful inquiry. The stern eyes seemed to question every foot of that road that led to the station. But nothing had thus far answered those stern questions. The warm sunshine fell peacefully on the solitary road. When the crows flew over it the woman standing there recalled those times in Florida when Salome had shrunk from the sight of those birds. She was afraid that she also was growing superstitious.

It was the end of the fourth week, and Moore had given no word. Already the hot sun and the intense blue heavens gave token that the meridian of the summer had come, that the season was ripening, and that some time it would fade.

"Even if he had been in Europe, he ought by this time to make some sign."

Mrs. Gerry, in this fourth week, was continually saying these words to herself as she went about her work, or when she took those walks to the corner of the road that led to the station.

She did not notice that Salome ever looked in the direction of that corner.

In this week the woman rose in the night, and moved noiselessly to the door of her daughter's room, which the girl kept shut. Formerly, this door had been allowed to remain open.

The mother would stand motionless, her white, straight form dimly outlined.

But her keen ears never heard any sound in the girl's

room. Once Mrs. Gerry put her hand softly on the latch. She felt as if she must open the door and see Salome. But she restrained herself. At last she crept back to her bed again.

Mrs. Gerry always endeavored not to bewail what had happened, what was beyond recall in the past. But now she could not help exclaiming many times a day in her solitary work :

"If she only had not written! If she only had let what is gone rest! Now how can she bear it? How can she bear it? He is like other men. He has consoled himself, as he had a right to do. Yes, he has consoled himself. That makes everything simple. Since nothing has changed, Salome should not have written."

These words repeated themselves so many times in Mrs. Gerry's mind that she almost thought she was possessed by them. She was impelled to say them to Salome, but she would not.

Finally it was to the two women who so loved each other as if they were living in an exhausted receiver, where they could not breathe freely—at least, it seemed so to the elder of the two. And it was ominous of she knew not what that Salome should choose to be so silent. Of course, it was a phase that would soon pass.

At last, in the fifth week, as Mrs. Gerry was saying, "Of course, he has consoled himself," she looked up from the dishes she was washing—looked through the little window over the sink. She saw Moore coming along the road where she had so often walked to meet him. He was coming quickly, and yet she thought there was no eagerness in his aspect. He was so far away that she might easily have been mistaken as to his identity. But she knew that she was not mistaken.

She drew her hands from the dish-water and wiped them on the roller-towel, her eyes fixed all the time upon that figure which grew more and more familiar.

It was in vain for Mrs. Gerry to condemn herself for

being so excited. There was nothing left for her but Salome and Salome's life, and she felt that she had less strength to contend with unhappiness and loss for her daughter than she had had when unhappiness and loss were possible in her own individual destiny.

But the woman who unclosed the door in response to Moore's knock did not reveal traces of excitement.

The moment the door was opened the young man mechanically took off his hat and stepped into the little entry. He put out his hand, looking with some entreaty at his companion.

When Mrs. Gerry, after a perceptible hesitation, put her hand in his, Moore suddenly bent down and kissed her cheek. His eyes were visibly full of tears; but the tears did not fall, and they were gone immediately.

The two went into the sitting-room, which seemed confusedly to Moore not much larger than the entry, and as if he could not move in it. He pushed forward a chair, and when Mrs. Gerry had seated herself he continued standing before her.

The woman did not know why she should have expected that Moore should be changed in person. Merely the passing of a year does not materially alter a man who is not yet thirty.

Directly she saw him, Mrs. Gerry felt the old attraction come to the front again. His face had a somewhat thinner contour, otherwise it was just the same.

It appeared not to be easy for either to speak at first. There was an air of expectancy about Moore. He stood at attention. While he now looked at his companion, he yet seemed not to see her.

"She is well?" he asked, finally.

"Yes."

He threw back his shoulders and took a long breath.

"I was afraid," he began, and then hesitated—"I was afraid she might be ill."

Mrs. Gerry shook her head.

"Where is she?"

Moore's air of attention increased, and it was plain that he was trying to conceal the evidence of the intensity of his interest.

"She is at school. She is assistant."

Mrs. Gerry was glad that she could be allowed a chance to speak commonplace words.

"She is able to work?" in surprise.

"Certainly; she is well," Mrs. Gerry answered.

Moore made a slight movement, as if he would walk across the room; but he restrained the impulse, and remained standing in the same position.

Afterwards Mrs. Gerry, in thinking of him, wondered how any one so without motion could yet give so vivid an impression of intense life. There was no longer any lack of eagerness about him. But Mrs. Gerry could not tell why the eagerness was, as it were, under protest.

"She wrote to me," suddenly said the young man. "You knew it?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Gerry wished to say that it was some time ago that Salome had written; but she remained silent. It was Moore himself who now made the remark that he had received the note nearly five weeks ago.

Having said this, he no longer tried to be quiet. He turned and walked to the window. He gazed through it in silence before he asked:

"When will she come?"

There was something in Moore's voice as he put that question that made Mrs. Gerry suddenly start from her chair and go to his side. He turned, and the two looked at each other. The woman found it hard to meet the passionate wistfulness in the man's eyes.

"When will she come?" he presently repeated.

"Not for three hours yet—not until the afternoon session is over; and often she stays with some of the scholars."

Moore took out his watch as he heard this answer.

"It would not do for me to go to the school?" he asked.

"Oh no. You see, her time is not her own during the session."

"And I must wait three hours?"

Mrs. Gerry nodded. She had in mind the fact that he had already waited a good many days since he had received Salome's note. To wait still longer might be possible, then. She did not put this thought in words, but Moore exclaimed:

"I know what you are thinking, and I can't blame you. But I have had a fight—yes, I have had a fight."

He turned abruptly away again, and renewed his restless movements about the room. His face was gradually becoming deeply flushed.

Mrs. Gerry did not ask for any particulars concerning the struggle he had just mentioned. But she was so deeply interested that it was difficult not to show that interest. She had resumed her seat when Moore had begun to walk. Her eyes followed him persistently. It was so strange to see him again—so strange, and yet his presence immediately seemed so familiar and so dear. Mrs. Gerry was obliged to own that his presence was very dear to her. In spite of the keen perplexity of the moment, the woman was conscious of that sense of comfort and pleasure which she had known before when with Moore. She would have said that it did her heart good to be near him.

He came back and gazed down at her intently.

"Tell me," he suddenly broke out, "has she suffered?"

Mrs. Gerry hesitated. Her instinct sprang up to shield her daughter. Still, why shield her from this man who loved her and had come back to her?

"Why don't you speak?" cried Moore. "Are you afraid of hurting me? Perhaps she has not cared so very much, after all. I wish you would tell me."

"She must have cared, since she has written to you," said the mother. "But she has been very brave—wonderfully brave."

"Well, then," with an indescribable movement of the head and shoulders, "that is more than I can say. I haven't been brave. I've been a miserable coward. I have thought a thousand times that life was not worth the living without her. I have resisted until resistance was loathsome to me. How I have hated the weeks and the months because I couldn't hope that they would bring me to her! But I didn't seek her. I obeyed her. I tell you, Mrs. Gerry, a man is a fool who obeys a woman when she tells him to keep away from her. But Salome was so earnest; she took it as an affair of morality, and I thought I must do as she said. I wish I had come back to her a hundred times: anything rather than to have done as I have done. You see, a man has to live all his life just to find out how to live."

"What have you done?" Mrs. Gerry asked this the instant there was a break in her companion's torrent of words.

Moore looked at her in silence. Twice he appeared to be about to burst forth into speech again, but he did not. At last he said, with comparative calmness:

"What have I done? I have gone right on loving Salome. You surely can forgive me for doing that, can't you?"

He looked at his watch again. He went to the window and gazed out over the fields.

"It's a long time to wait," he said, as if speaking to himself. Then presently he added that he would stroll about the country. He would meet Salome when she came from school. Which way should he go?

Having received his instructions, he left the house. Mrs. Gerry watched him until he disappeared in the birch thicket of an adjoining field. Then she patiently returned to her housework, conscious of a dim kind of thankfulness that she had work to do and strength with which to do it. But she was not able to resist the temptation to look repeatedly down the hill towards the school-house, and to

look and look long before it was time for the school to close.

"How childish I am!" she exclaimed aloud, on every visit to the end of the garden. But within five minutes she would repeat that visit.

Once as she stood there a light open buggy, drawn by a swift, powerful horse, came rapidly along. The animal was pulled in suddenly. There was only one occupant of the carriage—Walter Redd. At the first glance at him Mrs. Gerry almost thought that he had been drinking; his face was a dark crimson, his eyes having a red look in them.

He rested the hand that held the reins on one knee and spoke in his usual fashion.

"Did you know Moore was 'round here?" he asked.

Mrs. Gerry nodded. She had a certain sense of fear upon her, like bodily fear. She thought it was curious that she should at that moment recall the newspaper paragraphs of murders in lonely places.

"Did Salome expect him?" was Redd's next question. It was very unlike himself that Redd did not wait for any reply to that inquiry. He went on directly: "I don't think it 'll be very good for that fellow if he makes any more trouble for Salome."

"But, Walter," eagerly began Mrs. Gerry, "don't you know I told you it wasn't Moore's fault? And it's true."

"I know you told me so. Of course you'll shield him. There's something about him that took me in, too. I don't expect but what you think it wasn't his fault. But I wish he'd kept away from here. I do think that Salome might have kind of settled down and got reconciled. And here he comes again. By George, I wish he hadn't come!"

Redd did not raise his voice, but he spoke more and more rapidly. He did not wait for any reply. He shook the lines on the horse's back. The animal sprang forward.

"Walter! Walter!" cried Mrs. Gerry.

But Redd apparently did not hear. He did not turn his head.

III

"WHY DID YOU WAIT?"

MOORE, as he had walked up from the station, had seen the big horse coming along the road. It had approached swiftly, and the driver of it, sitting alone in the carriage, had stared hard at the man walking so fast. To Moore that man's face was familiar, yet at the moment he could not quite place it in his mind. And why was there something so baleful in it?

When the horse and wagon had gone on, and the hot, dusty highway was solitary again, save for his own figure, Moore exclaimed:

"Why, it was Redd!" And then he had immediately forgotten Redd. He had something far nearer his heart to think of.

Now when he had left Mrs. Gerry, he went as hurriedly as if he had not almost three hours to kill before he could hope to see Salome. He pushed through the birch thicket, and never stopped in his walk until he came to another road which went curving through a pine wood.

His face was steaming with perspiration. He took off his hat and tried to remain quietly sitting by the wayside. He leaned back against a tree, and gazed down the dim, secluded highway. He thought it was beautiful. He said aloud that it was beautiful. But he knew that he cared nothing at all for it. He looked at his watch again. It had taken him just thirteen minutes to come here. He supposed that the time would pass, since time always did pass—if you could only endure it. He rose impatiently and crowded his hat down upon his head.

There was some one turning the curve far along in the

gloom of the pine-trees. It was a woman, too. It was a young girl.

Moore's face suddenly grew pale from the furious beat of his pulses. He began walking quickly. For some reason Salome might have left school earlier. The two drew nearer each other. It was Salome.

She suddenly stood still. He could see her hands hanging clasped tightly in front of her. He could see those hands and her white face, and yet it seemed to him that there was something over his eyes. And yet in his haste he stumbled, and it took him so long to reach her that he felt as if he were in a dream.

But he did reach her. He had her in his arms, and he looked down at her face on his shoulder. Why should either of them speak?

After a while the two were walking slowly along under the trees. Moore was still holding his companion closely. He had said :

"I had to come."

She had looked up at him and answered, softly, "Yes, of course you would come."

And then there was a long silence while they walked aimlessly, and looked at each other.

Salome had thought that when he came she should ask him many questions, she should tell him many things; but now that he had come she felt as if she had no speech. And what were mere words, now that he was with her? There was no fact in all the world but the fact that he had come to her.

In this first moment there was no shrinking, no maidenly self-consciousness in the serious, full gaze that met his. It was her soul meeting his in his eyes.

It was Moore's face which suddenly changed in some indescribable way. There was still the rapture of the meeting in it. But there was something else in it—a memory, a cloud came to it. Whatever it was it seemed intolerable to him. Before she could speak he exclaimed :

"Oh, why didn't you write me that line before?"

"Before?" she repeated, in a puzzled way. "But it is now a long time since I wrote. You have been away?"

"No; I haven't been away. I received your note the day after you sent it."

Salome looked at him in surprise. She moved a little away from him.

"You were kept from coming?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, hesitatingly, "I was kept." Then he reached forward and took her hands tightly, exclaiming again, and even with fierceness:

"Oh, why didn't you write a few months before? I tell you it's a devilish thing you have done by waiting all this time!"

These words seemed so entirely unlike Moore, and the blackness now in his face seemed also so entirely unlike him, that Salome stared and shrank away.

"I don't know what you mean," she said at last.

She tried to stand erect and removed from him. But he would not let her.

"You ought to know what I mean," he went on, rapidly.

"You told me there was no hope. Do you remember those times when I came again and again to Augustine to plead with you? You wouldn't relent. You loved me, but you were hard as a stone in your resolution. I wanted you. Since I knew all about you, and you were not deceiving me, you ought to have married me then. And all this time I have tried not to hope that you would send me word. Finally I gave up hope—that is, I gave it up so far that I had made up my mind that I'd do all I could to shut out the memory of you. Salome, do you understand me?"

He turned towards her with a mixture of passion and regret upon his face that had a terrible effect upon her. She was stunned, bewildered, but she did not know what he meant.

"Do you understand me?" he asked again.

"No, no," she answered.

"Didn't you ever think that there comes a time when a man—or a woman, I suppose—gives up hoping, and tries to put away every thought of what he believes he cannot have? Didn't you ever think that?"

"No," said Salome, again. She was trying, in a vague and feeble way, to recall what her mother had said to her—was it upon this subject? What was coming? Had her mother been right, in some way? Perhaps people who were older had learned some things. But it was of no good if they had — of no good. She could not learn by the experience of other people.

When she had said that last "No" Moore was for a moment unable to go on. He thought there had been no words made fit to use in a moment like this. And yet how could he keep silent?

Salome was now walking apart from him. She had quietly insisted upon withdrawing herself.

She suddenly turned from the road and sat down on a stone. She took off her hat, and pressed her hands for an instant to her head.

Moore stood before her, gazing down at her with the look a man gives to that which is inestimably precious. The black look was gone from his face. But there was still intense suffering there.

At first she did not glance up at him.

"Oh, Salome!" he said, softly.

She looked up at him now. He appeared to resist something; then he threw himself down on his knees by her side and put his arms about her. She was frightened by the solemnity in his face.

"What is the matter?" she asked, after a pause, during which she had gazed intently at him. "Why don't you tell me? You say I ought to have sent for you before; but now that I have sent for you, it seems all wrong."

"Yes; it is too late."

When he had said this Moore suddenly pressed his face against the girl's shoulder. She felt him shudder as he did

so. She wondered why she was so calm. She thought she ought to be very thankful that she could be so calm, for surely a great, a terrible trouble was upon her. It had come to her, since Moore could say that "it was too late."

But she was sure that he loved her. She was sure of that. Then how could it be too late? Could it be that—Here Salome sprang away. Moore rose quickly to his feet.

"What!" cried the girl, "is it Portia Nunally?"

"Yes," said Moore.

"Oh!"

Having uttered that cry, Salome's lips closed as if it could not be worth while to open them again. She picked up her hat from the thick carpet of pine-needles upon which she had thrown it. As she did so she thought that those needles would be a good place upon which to lay herself down. Would it not be a pleasant thing to do, to lie there until she died? Of course, she should die in a very little while. Her mother would be very sorry—her mother would miss her as long as she lived.

Salome turned to her companion.

"I will go home now," she said.

She placed her hat on her head. She drew her hands across her face as if she were smoothing away something. She could not be grateful enough that she was so calm.

She began to walk onward quickly. Moore kept by her side. They had gone only a few rods when it seemed as if fire suddenly flashed through Salome's brain. But her face kept its pale tint. Only her eyes were red. She was not calm any longer. Perhaps she had not been calm at all.

"Portia Nunally!"

She pronounced the name with such an accent that the very air seemed to thrill with it. Then she laughed as she went on:

"I was very stupid, wasn't I, to write to you? As you say, a man—and perhaps a woman also—gives up hope after a while. A man tries to forget suffering. That's the way to do. It was so very stupid of me to write to you.

And how strange that I had forgotten Miss Nunally! I did not forget her for a long time. She is not a woman to be forgotten. But when I knew that she had gone to Europe with Mrs. Darrah, I did forget her. I thought that she was occupying herself with other plans. Oh, Mr. Moore, you see how silly I have been!"

Salome pulled a little silver watch from her belt and looked down at it, wondering as she did so why her eyes burned in that way.

"Mr. Moore, what time does your train go?" she asked.

There was no answer. Moore was striding on with his head bent. He was asking himself incessantly one question:

"Why didn't I wait? Why didn't I wait?"

Then he told himself furiously that it was perfectly natural that he should not have waited any longer without a shadow of hope. But since he loved Salome, why marry at all if he could not marry her?

But it was perfectly natural, perfectly natural—with violent insistence in his own mind—that he should seek for some consolation. If he had ever thought himself to be different from other men, he could now assure himself that he was precisely like the ordinary human being.

"Does your train start soon, Mr. Moore?"

As Salome repeated this question, the young man turned towards her.

He was feeling that he must find some terrible words to throw from him like missiles. If he could not find them, how could he speak? What an accursed imbecile he had been in that he had obeyed this girl and kept away from her! For a freak she had forbidden him to come. Now a freak had made her write to him that she had changed her mind. Of course she had changed her mind—and changed it too late.

"I don't know when my train starts," he at last made answer to her question. "Are you in a hurry for me to go?"

"Yes."

She stopped in her walk. Her hands were pressed on her chest in the gesture she had learned when she was subject to that painful oppression there.

"Didn't Miss Nunally go to Europe?" she asked.

She looked like one who is impelled to press a knife into a wound.

"Yes, she went," was the answer.

"But she did not stay?" went on Salome.

"No; she did not stay."

"You have seen her often?"

"Yes."

"I knew"—here Salome paused, but only for a brief space. She began again, "I knew that she loved you—at least, I felt sure of it."

There was no response from Moore. He also had stopped in his walk. He stood looking at his companion. He heard but vaguely the name of Miss Nunally. He was trying to overcome his tempestuous and unreasoning anger—his anger at fate, at God, at the whole universe. Why should he be made to suffer so? What had he done that this agony should be inflicted upon him?

"Mrs. Darrah has written to me a few times," said Salome. "She said that Portia had engaged herself to a man over there in London—to a man who was greatly in love with her, and who was rich."

"Yes," said Moore, in the same short way.

"It did not last, then?" questioned Salome.

"No; it did not last."

Salome was congratulating herself that she could speak consecutive sentences. But she wished that her eyes did not burn so. Since Moore was going to marry Portia, of course it was natural that she should show some interest. But she longed for Moore to go. At any moment it might happen that she would lose the power to speak consecutive sentences. And when that time came she would rather be alone. She did not understand why she should for a breath feel that she could not endure the excitement upon her, and

then should think she was calm. But she felt that Moore ought to go.

She glanced up at him. She was aware immediately that she was saying :

“Perhaps you are already married?”

She thought it would be something of a relief if he should say yes to that question.

“No ; but it is the same thing, so far as honor is concerned. I am to be married next week—next Tuesday evening, at half-past seven o’clock. Just four days from now. What a lucky thing it was that you should send me that note, Salome !”

“Does Portia know I sent it?”

“No.”

“Then I don’t see why it cannot be the same as if I had never sent it. My mother knows, but that changes nothing. Let it be as if I had not written it, Mr. Moore.”

“Certainly ; just as if you had not written it. How easily you solve questions, Salome !”

The girl glanced up at him again. Then she made a quick movement forward.

“Oh, I must go ! I must go !” she cried.

She hurried on along the dusty road. Moore stood watching her. He was trying to resolve to let her go. Surely it was best now that she should go. What more had he to say to her ? Absolutely nothing. He could never have anything more to say to her as long as he lived—not if he were an honorable man. Then another phase of honor came before him. The final vow had not been spoken. Perhaps when Portia understood matters she would release him. He had been greatly attracted to Portia. A vision of her now was with him : she was captivating ; she never made a mistake ; she never grated upon his mood ; she had soothed and comforted him—above all, she had convinced him that she loved him. He could not doubt that she loved him. There was her power ; there had been her power all along.

"I will tell her," he thought. Then he began to hope. He wished that he had not waited so long since he had received Salome's note. He had been fighting the same fight over and over ever since. If he were going to hold to his word, the one way to do was to write to Salome; the one way to do was to avoid seeing her. That potent power of personal presence, the memory of which unavoidably fades somewhat in absence, that was the power to be avoided. And here he was with Salome again, and the first moment had proved to him that that mysterious force which drew him to her was strong as ever—nay, it was stronger.

He had been gradually building up a shallow belief that he could be happy with Miss Nunally. Miss Nunally had such exquisite tact; she was so entertaining; so audacious, yet not too audacious. And she loved him!

It was now late to be convinced that he should simply have lived on without trying to build up anything. How could he know that the first impulse of one who has lost the best is to try and put something else in its place; to pretend that something else is best, though knowing piteously all the time that it is not.

"I will tell her," he now said, aloud.

He hastened after Salome.

"I will tell her," he said, eagerly, when he had reached her side.

"You will tell her?"

Salome said the words after him. She did not understand what he meant. She hardly thought it necessary that she should understand. There was one fact that was very plain to her.

"Yes, I will tell Portia," went on Moore, quickly. "She will know. She will remember that I have loved you ever since I saw you. She will refuse to marry me. She does not know how I have been thinking of you always, though I have tried so hard to forget. I suppose she believes that I have forgotten."

Salome made no response to these words. She had re-

sumed her walk, going forward intently as if her one object were to reach the end of the wood. She was thinking that she wished she could be at home. She wanted to be under the roof with her mother. Her mother had been right.

"I am going to explain to Portia," said Moore, again. "Salome!" impetuously, "won't you say anything to me? Don't you care for me?"

He realized, as soon as he had spoken those words, that it was very weak to put such questions. But the sense of being defrauded, cheated out of happiness, was so great in his mind that he could not speak as he ought. He was groping confusedly and madly after the love that he felt was his, but that he could not grasp and hold. Still, even in this confusion he was conscious of a dim sense that he might be stronger, more manly.

"You need not ask me if I care for you," said Salome. She slackened her pace, turning towards her companion. Her face and attitude brought back to Moore those walks through the scrub palmetto in Florida.

"Oh, can't we be happy?" she suddenly cried out. "Why should it be wrong to be happy?"

The entire unexpectedness of this exclamation, the sweetness of it, came to Moore with an indescribable effect. But when he made a swift movement towards her she put up her hands and shrank away from him.

"I must be very wicked," she said, brokenly—"very wicked indeed. Oh, Mr. Moore, I wish you would go away. Do go! I have been trying all these months to be good. You see I really tried. And now that I have left the South, now that I have come where it is so wicked to be happy, and where everything is rigid and upright—oh, don't you see how I must have fallen to be able to send you that note? All at once I could not hold out any longer. But it isn't of any use. You are going to be Portia's husband. Mr. Moore, why do you stay here? Haven't I told you that I wanted you to go?"

Moore shut his mouth tightly.

"Yes, you have told me that," he said. "Please don't say it again. It won't make any difference if you do. I shall stay with you every moment that is left me. I tell you," he cried out again, "it's a terrible thing you have done! You have trampled our lives under your feet just for a whim. You sent me away. I knew all about you. What if you had forged? What if you had done this thing or that? Were you not still yourself? Still the woman I love? You thought I couldn't be happy with you. You said you were afraid you were not upright. God! didn't you know I loved you? Is that some one coming?"

He asked this last question in an angry tone as a figure turned into the road far ahead of them.

Salome tried to look along the road. Though there were no tears in her eyes, the hot cloud still over them prevented her at first from seeing with any distinctness. But directly she recognized Nely Scudder, who was advancing rapidly. Then, as Nely saw the two in the road, she slackened her pace.

Moore felt that it was impossible for him to meet any one now. And he perceived, with a sense of intolerable injury, that Salome was relieved at sight of that person coming.

He said something about seeing her again—that he must see her again; then he turned and hurried away.

Nely Scudder came forward hesitatingly. She was alarmed at sight of Salome's face, but she was intensely interested and alert. She was sure that here was something romantic. She had never been sure in her own mind as to whether the new assistant teacher had been disappointed. Nely thought she would give anything to know whether that very handsome and "stylish" young man was Salome's beau. And had they been quarrelling?

But she could not ask.

"You look awfully!" she said as she came up, trying to put on an expression that should give no token of her having seen any one save Salome. But she found she could

not quite succeed in this, so she gave a short laugh, and remarked that she hoped she had not frightened anybody away, and she was going right along; and anybody that thought she was going to stay, and so had run off, might just as well come back.

Having spoken thus, Nely's eyes sought Salome's face again, and then she sprang forward crying, distressfully:

"You do look sick! Has that man been saying anything disagreeable? I declare I just hate him!"

Salome had stood trying to recall her power to speak. Now she sat down on the pine-needles. She motioned to the girl to sit beside her.

Nely flung herself down at her side and began to cry.

"Oh, what's happened?" she asked, tremulously. Then she shook her fist in the air, and repeated that she "hated him!" In the bottom of her heart was now the conviction that Salome had been disappointed; how nor why she could not imagine. It seemed impossible, too.

"I'll kill him!" she said, in a violent whisper. "I'll kill anybody that makes you look like that. I don't believe you have any idea how you look, Salome. Why, you look just awful!"

Salome placed her arm about Nely's waist, but she did not speak. It did not occur to her that there was anything to say. She was aware of a slight, dim sense of comfort in this contact with a human being who loved her. She knew very well that Nely had an enthusiastic affection for her.

"Can't you speak? Can't you speak ever again?"

Nely put these questions in the most anxious manner. She made a movement to rise, saying she guessed she would go for a doctor.

She was pulled back again, and presently she felt a soft, cold kiss on her cheek. And Salome said,

"I can speak well enough. But let's sit here quietly for a few minutes. I will put my head on your shoulder like this."

Nely immediately held herself strongly in her position. She had a certain feeling of exultation in her anxiety—exultation because she was allowed to sit and have Salome's head on her shoulder. To her Salome was the very perfection of woman. Mrs. Scudder often told her daughter that she "did wish that Nely would talk of something 'sides S'lome Gerry. Not but what S'lome Gerry was well enough, but she s'posed there was other folks in the world jest as good."

Here Nely would toss her head and reply:

"Just as good? I don't care if there is. It isn't goodness that makes you love anybody. But she's just as good as she can be, too. She isn't like folks that I've seen before, that are so uninteresting that you can't stand it, anyway. Do you s'pose, mar, it's because she almost had consumption and went to Florida? Or what do you s'pose 'tis? If I thought 'twas that, I d' know but I'd just up and have consumption, and then par would send me to Florida; and then maybe I'd begin to be interesting."

Here Nely would laugh shrilly. Once she added, with more seriousness than her mother quite liked:

"I certainly would do 'most anything if I could be anywhere near as interesting as Salome Gerry."

"I guess you're full up to the average, Nely," responded Mrs. Scudder, proudly. "'N' I guess S'lome is jest what she is 'thout anything to do with Floridy. She's a pleasant, pretty-lookin' girl, but I must say I don't see nothin' remarkable in her."

"You don't? Well, that's the queerest thing I ever did hear," said Nely.

It was on one of these occasions that Mrs. Scudder asked if it was gen'rally thought that S'lome give good satisfaction as assistant at the high-school.

Nely took the ground of not knowing and not caring. She said that it was against any person not to like Salome.

"Have you heard anything?" sharply.

Mrs. Scudder said she hadn't heard anything of any ac-

count. But she believed Mis' Hill did say that some considered that S'lome wasn't quite strict enough in some things.

"Pooh!" retorted Nely, "who's Mrs. Hill, any way, I should like to know?"

"She's a real good woman, Nely," was the reprimanding reply.

"I don't care if she is. She hasn't brains enough to fill the half of a peanut shell," said the girl.

"It ain't her fault if she 'ain't, and nobody wants to fill peanut shells with brains. You shouldn't talk so, Nely. I s'pose," with an air of unmistakable interest, "you 'ain't never heard for certain whether S'lome's ben disappointed or not, have ye?"

It was this question, often repeated, that now recurred to the girl as she sat under the pine-tree with Salome's head resting on her shoulder.

Who was that man? Nely had never seen any one in the least like him, and her glimpse of him had been tantalizingly brief. Yes, it must be almost a positive fact that Salome had a love affair, and it did not seem as if it could be just like other girls having beaus and getting married. No, there was something different about this.

Nely sat in perfect stillness. She was afraid to breathe deeply lest she should disturb her companion. If only Salome would tell her something. Nely felt within herself an unlimited capacity for keeping secrets and for sympathizing. Next to having a love affair of her own would be the fortune that should make her the confidante of the love affair of some one else. And it really seemed as if now she was right in the midst of something as good as a novel; only she felt worse than any novel ever made her feel. She liked a good cry when a heroine was suffering, but some way this was different.

She tried to look down at the face on her shoulder, but she could not see it without moving her head, and she was resolved not to move.

She was somewhat frightened that Salome should be so very still. Again that wish recurred to go for a doctor.

Nely bore it as long as she could, and then she said "Salome!" in the smallest kind of a whisper.

"Yes," said the other girl, without changing her position.

"Oh, do, do let me do something for you!" cried Nely, in an agony of anxiety. "I wish you'd just move, or something, won't you?"

Salome raised her head. She smiled at her companion.

"You needn't worry about me," she said, quietly.

Nely clasped her hands tragically.

"Can't I help you?" she asked, with such a wistful emphasis that Salome smiled again.

"Why, you have helped me by just sitting beside me and being still," she said.

"Oh, have I?" doubtfully.

"Yes, indeed. And now let's go home. This isn't much of a half-holiday, after all, is it? Where were you going?"

"I was coming of an errand for mother over to your house."

"Well, come now."

The two rose and began walking slowly out towards the opening in the wood.

It seemed to Nely that she could not contain her sympathy nor her curiosity; but the latter she would not express, "not if she died for it," she told herself. She tried not to let her eyes wander towards Salome; somehow it appeared dishonorable for her to try to pry into her companion's secrets; but in spite of all her efforts she could not keep her glance from going with humiliating frequency to the face near her.

She was rather disappointed that Salome did not wring her hands; she had an ill-suppressed desire also that Salome should tear her hair. Surely that was the way a real heroine should do under such conditions.

Having had these thoughts, Nely had sense enough to be ashamed of them, though she could not put them quite away

from her. At last she recalled that some first-class heroines were proudly composed and self-contained. That was really the way to be, of course.

Very soon the two girls emerged from the shadow and were going over the crisp gray moss of the pasture. The sunlight was very bright and warm here, and the air was full of the scent of cedar and bayberry and sweet-fern.

The sunshine, falling full upon them, seemed to have a noticeable effect upon the elder of the two. She stopped and turned her head towards the west, where in deep-blue, cloudless spaces the sun was going slowly down. It was yet some hours, however, to the sunset.

Salome pushed back her hat. There was a pathetic eagerness in the way she looked upward.

"You've heard of people being what they called marked with something, haven't you, Nely?" she asked.

Nely was surprised, but she answered immediately:

"You mean when they like or dislike something so much that they are unreasonable 's they can be?" she asked.

"Yes, just that. And you don't think they're quite responsible, do you?"

Salome put this question as if even this child's answer would be of some weight with her.

Nely stared an instant before she replied:

"No, I don't see how they can be, do you? There's Ann Tomlins, you know; she can't bear the sight nor smell of strawberries."

"I remember Ann Tomlins," said Salome. "Nobody blames her for it, I suppose."

"Why, of course they don't!" with some indignation. "But I guess I don't know what you are thinking about."

"I was thinking that I am marked with a love of the sun. That's why I liked Florida so well. It was never too hot for me. If I can have the sun, hot and clear, I can bear a good many things. We have to bear a good many things, don't we, Nely?"

Nely did not know why something in that voice affected

her so that she began to cry. She turned and flung herself into Salome's arms and cried as if her heart were breaking. Salome held her closely and spoke soothingly to her. In a few moments Nely lifted her head and declared that she was just as silly as she could be, and she was sure she didn't know what was the matter with her. "But oh, she did long to comfort Salome so!"

Salome laughed a little gently at this, and then they went on again, now among the birches through which Moore had come a short time ago. As they came out and in sight of the cottage among the rocks just above them, Salome paused, catching Nely's hand as she said:

"You can keep a secret, can't you, Nely?"

"Oh yes!" proudly.

"Don't tell, then. I should hate to have Mrs. Hill and all the rest talking. You understand?"

"Oh yes!" again, "you can trust me. And—and—" Nely paused and then burst out, "Ain't you going to be happy, Salome?"

Salome involuntarily turned her face up towards the sun again. The pallor of that face and the glow in the eyes made a deep impression upon Nely. She had never seen any one look like that, and she did not in the least know what it meant. How could she know that Salome, least of all, knew what it meant?

Salome seemed to rouse herself.

"Happy?" she said. "Oh, I don't know. Mother says it is not necessary to be happy. It is only necessary to be in the right."

"Oh, dear!" cried Nely. Then in a moment, "Isn't that your mother beckoning to us? Do I look 's if I'd been crying? Laura Hunt says I show it ever so long after I've been crying. I don't know what I should do if anybody should ask me if I'd been crying. I'll just stop long enough to have your mother give me the rule for that Harrison cake. We've lost ours, and we expect a lot of company next week."

They hurried up the rise in the road. Just before they reached the gate Nely paused long enough to say:

"You needn't be a mite afraid that I shall ever tell as long as I live."

IV

“AS IF SOMETHING WERE GOING TO HAPPEN”

“I s'POSE you don't want to ride down to the village, do you?”

Mr. Scudder was standing before the six-inch mirror that hung in the back porch for his especial benefit. He had taken off his overalls, and was peering into the glass and putting a comb through his hair. His hair now grew mostly around what might be called the edges of his head, and he combed it up towards the place where it did not grow. He had done all his “chores” an hour earlier than usual, as he always did on those nights when he went to the village. He had not heard any news for a whole week, and he was conscious of a desire to sit on the piazza of the store and hear what was going on. Pelly Loomis's horse had had the colic, and Mr. Scudder did not yet know whether it had lived or died. He had not heard whether Eb Tilson had kept his potato-vines any more clear of bugs than he had done last season. If Eb had been as slack as usual, Mr. Scudder felt that he wouldn't give seventy-five cents for the whole crop of potatoes.

Mrs. Scudder was passing what she called “a handle-brush” rapidly in front of and at the sides of the cook-stove, that she might remove any “clutter” incident to getting and clearing away supper. Nely was still standing at the sink washing the supper-dishes in the most desultory and indifferent manner. Her mother had said two or three times at the table that she didn't know, she was sure, what was the matter with Nely. She “looked as if she had been crying her eyes out, but you couldn't get nothing out of

her." The girl had come home that afternoon from Mrs. Gerry's with the rule for Harrison cake, and "she had been just as odd as she could be ever sence." As long as the school-master had given them a half-holiday, because he wanted to visit schools that afternoon, Mrs. Scudder had supposed that Nely would be in good spirits. She wanted the girl to go blackberrying, but Nely hadn't shown any interest in anything. "And she wouldn't say nothin'."

All this Mrs. Scudder had confided to her husband at the first opportunity. She concluded by remarking that if Nely hadn't had the measles she should think she was coming down with them, and should give her sage-tea.

But Mr. Scudder had only laughed, and remarked that Nely was a gal; 'n' if they expected to keep track of all the notions a gal could have they'd have their hands more'n full. To this Mrs. Scudder had responded by making the incontestable statement that she herself was a gal once.

Now Mr. Scudder repeated his remark from the back porch, that he s'posed she didn't want to ride over to the village. She said she didn't know as she did, 'n' she didn't know but she did.

"Well," he said, "you c'n be findin' out while I'm hitch-in' up."

Then he walked out to the barn.

Nely began to hurry as she put away the dishes. A moment later she dashed out to the barn and said:

"Mother's going, par; 'n' I wish you'd put in the other seat, because I want to go, too. I'm sick as death of just staying right here all the time."

"All right," responded Mr. Scudder, raising his head from the effort required to put the collar on the horse. "It 'll be all new to you over to the village, won't it?" Here he grinned.

"'Twon't, either," answered Nely, "but my head feels so bad that I guess the ride 'll do me good."

"Mebby 'twill. Anyway, it's a mighty pleasant night. You bring out my coat when you come; 'n' tell your mar

not to prink too long, for it gits dark earlier 'n' earlier every night now."

In a few moments more the Scudder house was locked, and the Scudder family were all in the "democrat," which was being deliberately pulled along the road by the Scudder horse, whose days of hurry seemed long since over.

Mrs. Scudder sat precisely in the middle of the back seat, and Nely was on the front seat with her father. There was not much conversation, as the equipage moved at a snail's pace up hill and down, and along the short level spaces. Sometimes Mr. Scudder pointed with his whip to some piece of land which, in his estimation, "wa'n't worked right." He and his wife occasionally exchanged a few words. Mrs. Scudder remarked that she didn't know's old man Forbes was shinglin' his barn; and Mr. Scudder responded that the old man had ben threatenin' to shingle it any time the last ten years, and he, for one, was glad he'd got at it.

It was a muggy night. The sun, as it neared the west, was sinking deeper and deeper into a bank of dark cloud. There was not a breath of wind. The horse, though it did not move out of a walk, was wet in streaks where the harness touched it. When the carriage came near any trees the shrill cries of the katydids were confusing.

"'Tain't the kind of a afternoon I like," said Mr. Scudder, looking back over his shoulder at the west. "I didn't notice as 'twas all cloudin' up so. If I had I d' know's I should have started. Foolish weather enough for that medder hay 't I cut this mornin'."

Mrs. Scudder also looked back over her shoulder. But she said 'twas a dry time and she didn't look for rain till after the moon had changed.

Nely, sitting by her father, said nothing. She hardly heard the words spoken by her companions. Her whole mind seemed to be filled with what she had seen and heard in the pine-woods that afternoon. She had never been so interested in her life. Her mind appeared to be bursting with the weight of her thoughts, and she could not speak

of them to any one. A sense of importance swelled her consciousness. But she could keep a secret, she could be loyal. She did not know but that she should almost welcome tortures in behalf of Salome Gerry. How Salome had looked! She certainly must be in love with that man who had seemed so agitated, and who had walked away so hurriedly.

"What ye thinkin' of, Nely? What ye got on yer mind?" The girl was aware that her father had put these questions to her. She roused and replied promptly that she wasn't thinking of anything, and she hadn't got anything on her mind. She ended by exclaiming:

"Ain't it hot?"

She took off her hat and began fanning herself violently with it.

The sun had now gone into the dense cloud, and the quickly going twilight of late summer had come. Faint streaks of "heat lightning" played above the horizon.

Mrs. Scudder threw back her shawl; she never went anywhere without a shawl, even in midsummer.

"I declare," she said, "it's as much 's I can do to ketch my breath. It's one of them times when you wouldn't be a mite surprised if something happened."

"That's just the way I feel, mother," cried Nely, in eager response. "I'm all worked up, somehow."

"Oh, pshaw!" returned Mr. Scudder, "that's jest like women. I guess there won't nothin' happen beyond a change in the weather towards morning. Come, Molly, don't ye shy. If you begin to shy such a night 's this I sh'll think the women are right, 'n' something is goin' to happen."

Mr. Scudder laughed comfortably as he pulled in the reins. Molly shied again and her driver touched her with the whip.

"What pesky thing 's the matter with the mare?" he exclaimed.

Nely leaned forward. Then she put her hand on her father's arm.

"Father!" she whispered. Her eyes glowed in the dusk.

"Well?" said Mr. Scudder with some impatience.

"Seems to me Molly's gittin' skittish in her old age," said Mrs. Scudder from the back seat. "Lemmy git out if she's goin' to cut up. Dwight, lemmy git out."

"Set still, Rebecca," was the answering command. "I guess I c'n manage Molly. If I can't I'll let you git out. • G'long!" lifting his whip.

But Molly only shied again.

"I sworn!" said Mr. Scudder, with some force. "I d' know what's got into Molly."

The animal did not seem to wish to go on. When her master touched her with the whip again she did not move forward, she only jumped a little aside.

"Dwight," cried Mrs. Scudder, "lemmy git out!"

She began scrambling over the side of the democrat, not minding her husband's repeated command to "set still."

In her estimation it was high time to leave any vehicle to which Molly was attached when Molly began to shy.

They had raised Molly, and Mrs. Scudder remembered that it was more than twenty years since the mare had been anything but steadiness itself.

She did not know how she did it without having the wheel turned, and those who know what are the difficulties in the way of leaving a democrat from the back seat, under the best of circumstances, will wonder how a somewhat bulky woman, who had had rheumatism, accomplished this feat.

But Mrs. Scudder floundered and scrambled out between the wheels. One of her lifelong principles had been that she would never stay in a carriage when the horse was "acting up." She would hardly have been more startled if the saw-horse in the woodyard at home had begun to "act up."

As soon as she could gather herself together she turned.

"Nely," she said, sharply, "git out! If your father wants to stay there 'n' git run over we can't help it. You git out."

"I ain't afraid," replied Nely, making no movement to obey.

"I guess, Rebecca," remarked Mr. Scudder, "that you're the one that 'll git run over. We can't git run over till we jump out. Now, you'll have the fun of gittin' in agin. Molly's all right now."

As if to illustrate this remark, the mare began to snort and paw.

"You call that bein' all right, do you?" retorted Mrs. Scudder.

"Father," said Nely in a half voice, "do you see anything over there in the bushes under that tree? That's what makes Molly act so. Oh, I'm frightened! I thought I saw something before, and then I thought I didn't. I'm just as frightened as I can be!"

Nely put her foot on the carriage step and swung herself as far out as she dared, clinging to the iron hold as she did so. Her curiosity was great; but she had a strong feeling that she did not wish to leave the carriage until her father left it.

Mr. Scudder's eyes turned towards the spot his daughter had mentioned. Then he cried out:

"I do believe there is something there!"

He threw the lines towards the girl, saying, "You hold them," then he sprang over the wheel with the agility of twenty years.

He walked quickly up to the bushes, which showed that they had been trampled upon. Among the bushes lay a man. He lay with that entire stillness which is so dreadful to look upon.

"Father," said Nely from the wagon, almost beside herself with fright and curiosity—"father, who is it?"

But there was no answer to this question. The girl had a conviction as to who that person lying there was. She did not know why she had this conviction, but she never doubted the truth of it.

Mr. Scudder and his wife were now bending over the figure among the bushes.

"Father," cried Nely, "is he dead? Is he dead?"

But there was no answer to this question either. It was in silence at first that the two examined the insensible man.

"I can't make out whether he's dead or not," at last said Mr. Scudder in a low voice to his wife.

She had not touched the man, but she answered directly, in the same voice:

"I don't reckon he's dead, somehow; but mebby he is."

"What's goin' to be done, anyway?" asked the man.

"Father! Father!" came the shrill voice from the wagon, "who is it?"

"Can't you be still, Nely?" asked her mother. The girl's penetrating voice was a kind of desecration of the strange stillness which seemed to have come with the discovery of that form among the bushes.

"What's the best thing to be done, do you think?" asked Mr. Scudder again, appealing to his wife's never-failing common-sense and kindness.

"I'm thinkin'," she responded. "S'pos'n we git him right into the democrat and take him to the house? We c'n all git him in, I guess. You take out the back seat 'n' leave it here. 'Tain't quite a mile back home, 'n' it's over two mile to the village. Then you go right back for the doctor. I guess that's the best we c'n do, don't you think so?"

"Yes, 'tis."

Having said this, Mr. Scudder stepped quickly to the carriage, and began to unfasten the screws which held the back seat in place.

"Father," said Nely, twisting about in her place, "father, is he dead? I should think you might tell me!"

The girl shivered with excitement and dread.

"We don't know, child," was the answer. "He's layin' there insensible."

"But who is he?"

"Nely!" said Mrs. Scudder, reprovingly. "He's a stranger. We don't know who he is."

Nely clinched the reins tighter than before.

"It's that man," she whispered to herself. "Oh, what has happened? And what will Salome do?"

She watched the movements of her father and mother. She saw them try to lift the man. Then her father came to the horse's head and backed the animal so that the end of the wagon was close to the bushes. He let down the tail-board.

"Nely's strong," said Mrs. Scudder. "Come here'n help! Molly'll stand now, won't she, Dwight?"

"Yes, she'll stand."

The man looked up and down the road.

"I didn't know but somebody 'd be comin' along," he said.

But in the deepening dusk no one could be seen.

"Come, Nely," said Mrs. Scudder.

The girl slowly descended. She shuddered and shrank.

Yes, it was that man. She had been sure of it. And she believed he was dead. Oh, what would Salome do?

"Come, Nely, help your mother," said Mr. Scudder. "There ain't no time for notions now. He's a good-sized man, but we c'n git him in well enough. There. P'r'aps we'll bring him out of this all shipshape. He's young, and young folks stand 'most anything."

The stranger was now lying in the bottom of the carriage. Mrs. Scudder mounted, with almost the agility her husband had displayed, and arranged her shawl for the man's head to rest upon.

"I wish you could git Molly out of a walk, Dwight," she said. "The sooner we c'n have a doctor the easier I sh'll feel."

Mr. Scudder took his seat. Once more he glanced along the road to see if, haply, some one might come by whom he could send word to the village. But there was no one. He gathered up the lines.

"I guess I'll set over here and hold his head," said Mrs. Scudder.

She spoke in a low voice. Her face was filled with an awe-struck gravity that was not without a hint of tenderness when her eyes rested on the face she now placed on her lap as she sat on the floor of the wagon.

Even in this fixed expression there was that in Moore's countenance which could attract. And the helplessness, the fear that life would not come back, impressed this group of simple people as the more worldly-wise would also have been impressed.

The old mare was made to understand that this was an occasion when she would do well to recall her former vigor and speed. She trotted home briskly. Twice during the few moments that the journey required Mr. Scudder turned and asked, "Has he come to any yet?" And each time Mrs. Scudder said "No."

And Moore had not "come to" in the slightest degree when he had been placed on the bed in the little spare bedroom and Molly was on her way, still at a brisk trot, to the village for the doctor.

But Mrs. Scudder knew now that the young man breathed. He was not dead. That was all that she could ascertain.

She sat by the bed and directed Nely to bring mustard and hot-water cloths. She rubbed Moore's hands and chest while she waited for Nely to fetch what she had ordered. She wondered how he had been hurt. She had found no blood upon him.

But the mystery of the circumstances was absorbed in the woman's anxiety.

Nely ran back and forth between the bedroom and the kitchen stove, where she had made a fire. The heat in the low-browed rooms was intense, but she did not think of it. The clouds had spread themselves over the whole sky, and it was very dark. Sometimes there was a low, distant grumble of thunder.

Once Mrs. Scudder, taking a hot cloth from her daughter's hand, said she should think by the sound that the

tempest was workin' round towards the south. She didn't think they'd ketch the heft of it here ; she hoped, anyway, it would clear the air some.

The perspiration was dropping from her face. The small blaze of the kerosene lamp seemed to heat the room unbearably. Outside, against the screen-cloth tacked upon the window, the moths were dashing themselves in their effort to get to the light.

Moore's long length lay motionless on the bed. His yellow beard was more closely cropped than usual and his hair also was cut short, save for the locks which hung longer over his forehead.

His face was very peaceful as Mrs. Scudder looked down at it. That expression which might be called a mixture of manliness and tenderness, which his face when at its best often showed, was visible now, and the two women were greatly moved by this and by his helplessness. "It is when the strong are helpless that the latter state is most appealing."

Nely, having delivered the last towel, with which she had nearly scalded her hands in wringing from the water, stood gazing down at the man.

She was thinking that she didn't wonder that Salome loved him, if she did love him. But perhaps she didn't love him, and so he had tried to kill himself.

This solution of the mystery at first seemed quite plausible to Nely. She thought that if she were a man and loved Salome, and Salome did not return that love, she should want to kill herself — only that she was always so afraid of being hurt. In addition to all her other emotions on this occasion, the girl had to contend with the secret sense of importance caused by the fact that she had seen Moore before. Half a dozen times this secret almost burst from her. She imagined how her mother would look if she should suddenly exclaim :

"I saw him this afternoon with Salome."

The fight she was obliged to keep up to prevent herself

from doing this was a counter-agitation, and perhaps kept her in tolerable poise through the hour of waiting that followed.

After a short time Mrs. Scudder, convinced that she effected nothing, ceased to make any more attempts to restore consciousness to her charge. She sat there by the bed gently fanning the young man.

Her thoughts wandered far afield. Strange ideas came to her until, as she told herself afterwards, she was kind of frightened jest thinkin' what a woman could think if she let her mind run on.

Once she leaned forward and tenderly pushed that lock of hair from Moore's forehead.

"I wonder who his mother is," she thought. "I'm thankful she don't know 'bout this. I'll do all I can for him. If he was my boy, I should want anybody to do what they could."

Here Mrs. Scudder's mild, prominent blue eyes became misty, and she hastily passed her apron over them.

There was a decided snuffle behind her chair.

"Nely," said the woman, "is that you?"

"Yes," said Nely, sobbing, "and I shall have sixteen fits if I don't cry. I'm so excited I don't know what to do."

"Cry, then," was the instant advice. "It's a tryin' time, I do think."

Nely pressed her handkerchief to her mouth lest she should explain that she was having an especially trying time, for she was keeping a secret.

"There! it's raining!" she cried, as a heavy dash of rain came straight down, without a breath of wind to sway it from the perpendicular, "and I hear wheels."

The girl ran out upon the back porch. She could not see anything from the lighted room. She looked into blackness; the rain hissed upon the dried grass of the yard. It made such a noise that she could hardly tell whether she heard the sound of horses' feet softly falling on the turf.

"Father!" she shouted.

She grasped a pillar of the porch and leaned far out, the warm rain dropping heavily on her hair. "Father! Is that you?"

"Yes," said a voice close behind her. "Has he come to?"

"No. Did you get the doctor?"

"He was over to Gay's Corners. Tim Drew's gone after him on his colt. I wish you'd light the lantern."

Mrs. Scudder, standing at the open back door, heard these words above the swish of the rain, and she could not suppress a groan as she heard them.

"There ain't nothin' to be done, then?" she said, as her husband stepped forward to take the lantern handed him by Nely.

Streams of water were running from Mr. Scudder's hat. The lantern threw into sight behind him the shining, wet, solemn face of the mare, with her ears drooping disconsolately outward, away from each other.

"Nothin' but to wait," was the answer, and Mr. Scudder took hold of the bridle and walked away towards the barn.

When he came back his face showed how intense had been his interest during his drive. He hurried into the bedroom. But he came back directly.

"There ain't no difference in him 's I see," he said, in a whisper.

"No, there ain't," responded his wife.

"I like the looks of him first rate," he said.

Then he retired to take off his soaked clothing. While he was gone Mrs. Scudder resumed her seat by the bed on which Moore lay. But she hurried again into the kitchen when she heard her husband return.

"Did you hear nothin' about him?" she asked, quickly.

Nely stood breathless, awaiting the answer.

"Not a thing," said the man.

"I declare, I sh'd almost er thought somebody'd er known something."

"Mebby somebody does," returned Mr. Scudder, "but I

ain't seen many folks, you know. I don't believe he's been in the village, anyway. P'r'aps he's come from the deepo 'n' didn't go to the village at all. He might have walked right over to this neighborhood to see somebody or do some business. 'Tain't no use guessin' 'bout it, anyway. When he comes to he'll tell us who he is."

"If he ever does come to." Mrs. Scudder spoke with great dejection.

"He can't be that relation o' Luke Johnson's that went to sea, can he?" suddenly inquired Mr. Scudder.

"Dwight!" cried his wife, "I should think you'd know better than to imagine the Johnsons ever had any relations that looked like this young man."

Mr. Scudder acknowledged that it wasn't likely. And then, having suggested that they should not guess as to the identity of the stranger, he went on and made half a dozen suggestions of the most preposterous kind. He was extremely depressed and excited. He kept walking round the kitchen and into the bedroom. He repeated that he liked the looks of the fellow.

The rain continued to fall as if it would never cease. In an hour a horse and carriage came rushing into the yard, and almost before the wheels had stopped the door opened and a small thin man entered.

"Scudder," he said, "I wish you'd put my horse under cover. It's raining by the pailful. Now, who is it that's hurt?"

He followed Mrs. Scudder into the bedroom. Nely hovered about near the bed.

Though the man was only a country doctor, he had sharp eyes and common-sense, aside from his education.

He caught up the lamp and bent over Moore with it in his hand, his gaze seeming to dive into the calm face before him. To Mrs. Scudder the very calmness of the face was something terrible. She had been watching it so long that she could now hardly endure that the doctor's silence should continue for a moment; but she respected his silence.

Presently Mr. Scudder returned from the barn. He stood in the doorway and looked at the bed.

Perhaps the temptation to act the part of an oracle is naturally strong in a physician. To act the part of an oracle might veil many things. But there was no reason for speaking, and Dr. Sands did not speak for a long time. He passed his hands deftly and searchingly over Moore's body. He turned the head from side to side on the pillow; he lifted it and looked at it.

Mrs. Scudder used to say afterwards that if she was ever out of patience with any one, 'twas with Dr. Sands that night when he came to see that young man.

At last the physician straightened himself.

"Well," he said, more as an exclamation of relief to himself than as an address to any one.

"I do hope you've found out something," said Mrs. Scudder, more sharply than she usually spoke.

"Oh yes," said the doctor. He thrust his hands into his pockets and gazed down absorbedly at his patient, compressing his lips and wrinkling his forehead.

"Beautiful, neat kind of a blow," he said, addressing himself.

"Is he going to come to? That's what I want to find out."

As he spoke Mr. Scudder advanced into the room. He had an inclination to shake Dr. Sands, holding him by the back of his coat-collar.

"Oh yes," replied the doctor; "I reckon on his coming to if we can do the right thing for him. I'll go down to the station and wire up to Boston for Jennings. He's about the man for this case. He can take the midnight train that stops at the Corners, and I'll meet him. Now, who is the fellow, anyway? Have you looked in his pockets? We might as well send for his mother, if he's got one. You don't know how things will turn out. Do you know him, either of you? But Tim Drew said nobody knew him, didn't he?"

As Dr. Sands spoke he lightly but effectively searched Moore's pockets. In the breast-pocket of his coat he found two envelopes. One was empty and bore no postmark, but it was addressed to Miss Portia Nunally, at a village on the "North Shore." The other bore Moore's name, and had evidently been received the day before, from the stamps upon it.

This letter Dr. Sands opened, his eye going swiftly down the page, his keen, somewhat hard face not changing in the least as he read "My dearest" at the top in tall, dashing handwriting. This letter was signed "Always your Portia."

And that was all the letters. There was a case with Moore's visiting-cards in it, and half a dozen of his firm's business cards were in his waistcoat pocket. It was easy to learn who he was.

Dr. Sands held up Portia Nunally's letter between his thumb and finger.

"This is the woman to send for," he said. "This is the woman he was going to marry next week. I'll wire her, too, when I send for Jennings."

Nely, hovering about in the room, fastened her eyes on the envelope which Dr. Sands still held. Her glance took in the woman's name. So he was going to marry somebody else; he wasn't going to marry Salome, after all. She should just like to know what had made him look at Salome that kind of a way; she should just like to know—she clasped her hands together in an ecstasy of excitement and curiosity.

Dr. Sands now abruptly went into the kitchen and began to put on his rubber coat, which had dripped a long stream of water on the floor. Mrs. Scudder followed him instantly.

"But ain't you goin' to do nothin' for him?" she asked, in a horrified tone. "Be you goin' to leave him jest like this?"

"It's no use to try to give him medicine," answered the doctor, rapidly buttoning his coat; "might as well give medicine to a dead woodchuck. Let him lie there; it's all you've got to do."

And Dr. Sands opened the door and ran out to the barn, followed more slowly by Mr. Scudder with the lantern.

"I do wish," said Mrs. Scudder—"I do wish that Dr. Sands wouldn't 'low himself to talk like that. It sounds kind of butcherin', somehow."

After a few moments' consideration Mrs. Scudder announced that she should put mustard on that young man's feet, and on the back of his neck, anyway. Mustard never did any harm yet, and sometimes it worked like a charm.

In the hour that followed Nely was going at intervals between waiting upon her mother to the little lampstand in the bedroom, where lay the letter Portia Nunally had written to Moore, and which the doctor had taken from the young man's pocket. She seemed bewitched by that large square envelope. That must be a love-letter, and it wasn't written by Salome to this man. It was written by some one else. Perhaps Salome had been disappointed. Nely wondered what would happen now. Again she said aloud that she was just as excited as she could be. She didn't know but she ought to drink a little red-lavender in a glass of water.

And when that man Dr. Sands had called Jennings came, what would be done to that man on the bed there?

Altogether, Nely felt that things were happening in a bewildering manner; but she had a secret consciousness that they were romantic.

Mr. Scudder had walked back and forth from the kitchen to the bedroom a few times; then he had thrown himself on a lounge, and, despite his interest, he had fallen asleep, and his snoring was mingled with the swish of the rain on the porch roof.

It was now after ten o'clock, and the night was so close that it seemed difficult to get air enough to breathe. Nely went out upon the back piazza. Her mother had been trying to persuade her to go to bed, but the girl scoffed at this idea. She said that she never expected to sleep again in all her life.

Now, as she stood there, the rain began to slacken, the clouds were less black. Along the west there was a broadening streak of light; a wind from the north blew over the meadows below the barn.

"It's going to clear," said Nely.

And as she said those words she started back to the house, impelled by a sudden impulse. She would go to Salome. She would tell her what had happened. Perhaps Salome ought to know. Anyway, she would go; she must go.

She hurried into the house.

"Mother, the rain is over. I'm going out. I'm just as nervous as I can be. I've got to go. Don't you worry about me. Oh!" — as she thought her mother was about to remonstrate — "if you tell me I mustn't go I shall have a fit! I shall, as true as I live."

Nely knew very well that she should beat down any objections that her mother might raise; she had beaten down all objections to her own way as long as she could remember.

"Do put on your rubbers, then," was all that Mrs. Scudder's remonstrances came to.

In another moment Nely's skirts were brushing the wet grass, or her feet were splashing through puddles, as she fled on along the road towards the small house on the Ledge.

V

AT THE SCUDDERS'

SALOME, left alone with her mother after Nely had gone with the recipe for Harrison cake, turned from her companion with a gesture which seemed to say, "Don't speak to me."

Mrs. Gerry obeyed that gesture. She sat down, taking up some sewing and resolutely threading her needle, not glancing at her daughter, who was standing in the middle of the room, with her hand resting on the top of a chair.

After a few minutes, however, Mrs. Gerry said :

"I do wish you would sit down."

Then the woman was sorry she had spoken. It betrayed a weakness to speak thus ; and it was Mrs. Gerry's constant desire that she should not betray or feel a weakness. Ever since her daughter had passed childhood it had seemed to Mrs. Gerry that she must be strong, not only for herself, but for Salome, also. And, clear-thoughted as this woman usually was, there had still been many hours of confusion when her mind had dwelt on this subject. The fear that she had actually begun to judge Salome by a different standard from that by which she judged others was an increasing fear that amounted sometimes to assurance that such was the case. There was only one way to judge—was a thing right or wrong ? But Salome—she was different. A wrong thing done by her was not the same as a wrong thing— When she reached this point in that ever-repeated train of thought Mrs. Gerry would start back from herself in fear of what she might be led to think. And always her conclusion was, "Salome is so different."

At times she would break out into the question, "But those others who do such wrongs, are they different, too? Has something made it less a sin, also, for them?"

Salome turned to her mother.

"Did you speak to me?" she asked.

Mrs. Gerry's face broke from its repression. She put down her sewing. It suddenly seemed a kind of irreverence to sew at this moment.

"Yes, I asked if you would sit down," she said.

"Oh yes; certainly," replied the girl.

She leaned back in the chair for a moment. Then she looked towards where Mrs. Gerry sat. Her eyes had that vague, dazzled expression which is sometimes seen in a face whose owner is watched.

"Mother," she said, turning quickly, "I am suffering. I am suffering."

The words were repeated sharply, but still in a low voice.

There was no answer directly. Mrs. Gerry was trying to summon all her powers to her daughter's aid. For what else did she live, save that she might help her daughter? However incalculable was the love, it was impossible that human nature should not sometimes be weary. It was almost a deadly weariness now that seemed to paralyze Mrs. Gerry's mind. She had been anxious until it seemed to her that she could not feel anxious any more. But in her numbness there was still a dull misery which helped to confuse her.

"Yes," she answered, wishing it might be given her to say the right thing, but knowing dully her inefficiency; "I feared you might be unhappy. But, Salome, Salome," her voice rising, "you may, perhaps, have to give up happiness. We have to do that sometimes."

There was no answer to this. There was still that same blind look in the girl's eyes.

"You have seen Mr. Moore?" Mrs. Gerry decided that words could not be quite so painful as this silence, and perhaps if she talked some, light would come to her.

"Yes," said Salome. "Did he tell you?"

"He didn't tell me anything." Mrs. Gerry was glad she was benumbed, because if she had not been, she should have gone to her child and have taken her in her arms, and any manifestation of affection now would have prostrated her still more. And yet she was getting used to things, she believed.

After a short silence Salome said :

"You were right, mother. I wonder if you are always right? Since I had sent him away, there was no reason now why I should write to him ; but I wrote. He came to tell me he is going to marry Miss Nunally. Mother, is that the way men are?"

"Men and women, I think," was the answer. "Then this is the end of it?"

"Yes," said Salome, promptly, "this is the end of it."

She rose and went to the table where lay a package. She took it, remarking that she would correct those exercises, that she ought to have done it in the morning. She stood with the papers in her hand, looking down at them. Then she walked to the door and paused with her back to her mother.

"Why do you say women also are that way?" she asked.

"Because women are also human beings," was the answer. "I tell you people are going to try to console themselves if they think hope is really gone."

Salome turned about. She smiled as she said that perhaps she would console herself.

"How agreeable that would be!" she added.

She went out of the room, but she came back to say that perhaps Mr. Moore would come to the house again, as they were interrupted in their talk. "And if he does come—mother, are you listening to me?—if he does come, don't let me see him. If I saw him again, I might ask him something. Why, mother, I might ask him to break with Miss Nunally and marry me—since we still love each other. So you see, plainly, that I must not see him, don't you, mother?"

For you wouldn't have me ask him to do that, would you? That would be what Mrs. Scudder would call, if she knew, 'of a piece' with all the rest I have done. So tell him that I will not see him again. And, mother, will you be very kind to him?"

Salome crossed the room to Mrs. Gerry, and dropped down on the wooden footstool where her mother's feet had rested. She flung the package of exercises from her, and put her arms about her mother, repeating, with a piercing tenderness:

"Will you be very kind to him?"

Then she placed her face on her mother's bosom, drew a long breath, and was perfectly still.

Mrs. Gerry also was quiet, holding the girlish figure with a stern closeness.

Some moments passed thus, and then Salome rose, took the package of papers again, and now she left the room.

With those mechanical movements which mean so much, or so little, Mrs. Gerry adjusted her glasses, pointed her thread, and held up her needle, gazing at the eye as she made several fruitless dives at it with her thread. She could not find the eye, though she tried again and again. But her eyes were perfectly clear, there were no tears in them. The tears and the blackness were in her heart.

At last she rose. She folded her work and placed it in the chest of drawers. She went to the window and looked through it. Mingled with her other thoughts was the thought that she ought to sprinkle the clothes for tomorrow's ironing.

But she was looking for Moore. If he came, she was to be very kind to him. He was only like all the rest; he could not be hopelessly faithful. But why should he be? That was not like human nature. It was one of the happy truths about human nature that it could turn its hopes and its happiness into different channels. Perhaps the tide

never could rise quite so high in those other channels, but what of that? People adjusted themselves.

Perhaps Salome would adjust herself. With this thought there came to Mrs. Gerry's mind the thought of Walter Redd. A woman's mind will wander so wildly sometimes.

The hours went on until it was supper-time. Mrs. Gerry prepared the meal as usual. Since Moore had not come again it was not probable that he would come at all now. He had gone. That was altogether the wisest thing for him to do. Now, as after death or any other calamity or blessing, things would settle down into their ordinary course. That was one mercy—things had to settle down, and, sooner or later, people accepted everything.

When supper was ready Mrs. Gerry went to the foot of the stairs and called Salome in precisely the same tone in which she always called her.

And Salome came down directly, and ate her toast and sugared blackberries and drank her tea. If you had looked in upon the two as they sat there you would have envied them their cosyness and content. And they talked about whether it would pay to dry the seek-no-further, or let them go and save every one of the Porter apples.

And all the time they talked each knew that the other was listening for a step that might come. Mrs. Gerry was continually saying over and over to herself, "If he is wise he will stay away; if he is wise he will stay away."

All the same, too, she knew that it was not like a young man to stay away. And why had he come at all?

The dusk deepened rapidly into evening, for now sultry clouds were heavy in the west. A lamp had to be lighted that the supper dishes might be washed. This dish-washing was always Salome's duty, and she performed it now, while her mother secretly watched her, dreading and yet longing to meet her eyes.

Notwithstanding her resolution Salome could not help hurrying. Once she stopped to look out at the open door

into the muggy blackness of the night. It was raining heavily by this time.

"I'm glad it is warm," she said. "I want it to be warm always. There is the bell down in the village striking eight, mother. It sounds muffled, mother," unconsciously raising her voice. "Why does it sound muffled?"

"You know it always sounds like that when the air is so thick and heavy," explained Mrs. Gerry in a careful voice.

"Oh yes, so it does. I had forgotten that. I'm going up-stairs. Good-night! I hope it won't be cooler after the lightning."

Mrs. Gerry rose and hurried to the door, reaching it before her daughter. Her worn face was flushed, save that about the mouth it was piteously pale.

"Salome," she said, pleadingly, "why won't you stay down here with me a little while?"

The girl moved her head with a distressful motion. But she spoke quite cheerfully.

"Please let me go up-stairs, mother. I must correct those exercises, you know. Good-night! and you needn't worry in the least about me. I am very strong. And you know that women, as well as men, console themselves."

Salome left the room, and her mother heard her going up the stairs.

Sitting there alone, Mrs. Gerry was seized by the conviction that Moore would return, and, in spite of all she could do, she began nervously to listen and watch for him. She extinguished the light that she might better see the road in the broad and frequent flashes of thunderless lightning. At first the continuous rush of the rain made it impossible for her to hear the approach of any one.

She did not think of going to bed. Any comfort, physical or mental, was not to be thought of. But surely the minutes would go less draggingly if she sat there than if she were in bed.

It was before the clock struck eleven that Mrs. Gerry, in one of the lightning flashes, saw a figure coming up the hill

towards the house. The figure was running. She did not know if it were man or woman, because it was in a black cloak and hat; but she knew that it was running.

The woman stood up straight and still, waiting. Somebody was coming there. By this time the rain had ceased. There was a low murmur of cool wind among the currant-bushes in the yard.

Mrs. Gerry had never believed in premonitions; but she had suffered so much that now her nerves were ready to play her any trick. Somebody was coming to tell something terrible. That was not Moore.

She started towards the door, stumbling over a chair and knocking it down with a loud noise. But, unlike her ordinary self, she would not wait and reasonably light a lamp first.

She found the door and flung it open; Nely Scudder fell against her. She took hold of the child's arm and drew her in with a sort of repressed violence.

"Who is sick?" she asked in a whisper. "You can't breathe. Why did you run uphill so?"

For Nely, as she came farther and farther in her journey, had continued to increase her pace until now her breath was beating all through her, and it was impossible for her to speak a word. She leaned up against the side of the door, her sobbing breath sounding loudly in the darkness. She was afraid that in her confusion she might tell what she had promised not to tell.

"I want Salome," she cried out at last.

"But what—" began Mrs. Gerry, so puzzled that she hardly knew how to frame her sentence.

A door at the head of the stairs immediately opened, and steps were heard descending.

"I want Salome alone," said Nely.

In the darkness Nely's hand was grasped, and she was drawn up the stairs.

Mrs. Gerry groped her way into the kitchen, lighted a lamp, and sat down alone. There was a curious pang in

her heart at this moment that her daughter was not with her, that she had withdrawn herself. In the keenness of this feeling she forgot to ask, at first, why she had done it, and why it could possibly be that Nely should have come in the night in this way.

Up-stairs in Salome's room there was a brilliant light, for Salome had been sitting resolutely correcting her pupils' exercises. She clung to that work as though to give it up would be something she could not bear. Now, however, her eyes blazed as she held Nely's shoulders and looked down at her. The hardly kept self-control left her so suddenly that she seemed never to have had it. She shook the girl.

"Tell me quickly!" she commanded.

Nely gasped.

"It's that man," she cried. She shrank away, frightened by the gleaming intensity in the face above her.

"What! what!" cried Salome. "Why do you stop? Go on, I tell you!"

And Salome clutched more tightly the slender shoulders and shook them again.

"The one I saw in the pine woods with you," Nely stammered on; "we found him 'most dead. He doesn't know anything. I thought you'd want me to come and tell you; I thought—oh, dear, I'm so frightened!"

Nely staggered back, released from the hands which had held her. The girl began to cry loudly and bitterly as she used to do when a child. But Salome did not mind her in the least. She had turned and taken the lamp. With it in her hand she looked vaguely at Nely, thinking of one necessary question to ask.

"Where is he?"

"At our house."

Then Salome rapidly went down the stairs. Her mother met her with a lamp in her own hand. Salome glanced back at Nely, who was following, sobbing with excitement.

"Tell her," said Salome. She took a shawl from a chair

in the little entry, wrapping it round her and shivering as she went.

Her mother thought it strange that her daughter should say that it was cold. She watched her hurrying down the path to the road, the increasing light of the cool blue space in the northwest showing her form against the blackness of the bushes.

Presently, perhaps, Mrs. Gerry would follow her. But now she turned towards Nely, who had not yet sufficient presence of mind to go with Salome, as she had meant to do.

She replied more coherently to Mrs. Gerry's terse questioning, and in five minutes these two were on the road towards Mr. Scudder's house.

Can you not think what dreadful thought was foremost in the woman's mind as she walked over the wet highway?

She was thinking of Walter Redd's face and his words as he had sat in his buggy and talked to her. But for all that, she knew that Walter Redd could not do an evil thing.

Far in advance of them, Salome was nearing the Scudder house, with but one feeling, it seemed, ruling her—the feeling that spurred her on to annihilate space. Her feet were so heavy, they dragged so upon the highway, or she thought they did, that her hot brain grew hotter and wilder with every moment that passed.

When she opened the door leading into the Scudder kitchen she saw only Mr. Scudder, asleep on the lounge. She could dimly discern his figure by the light that came from the next room.

She stepped within and leaned against the wall.

"Is that you, Nely?" asked Mrs. Scudder's voice.

There was no answer. Just now Salome was literally unable to speak.

The question was repeated, and then Mrs. Scudder rose from the chair where she was sitting near Moore's bed and came forward. She had been wishing that she had not let Nely go out, and was beginning to be anxious about her.

Nely was such an excitable child ; Mrs. Scudder in her secret heart was rather proud of the fact that Nely was excitable ; it made her so different from her father and mother ; but the mother often mentioned this excitability in a deprecating way to the neighbors.

Mrs. Scudder's large, plump face was worn and anxious now as it appeared in the open doorway with the light behind it. She thought it was trying of Nely not to answer her. She peered forward, at first not being able to see anything. Then her voice rang sharply.

"Nely!"

She was frightened.

"It isn't Nely," said Salome. But she could not yet step forward. Now that she had reached the house there was a sudden weight upon her. She remained leaning against the wall. She had let her shawl slip from her, and it lay in a heap at her feet. She had worn no hat.

Mrs. Scudder could not recognize the voice. Bewildered, she stepped back and took the light from the stand, returning to the kitchen with it.

"It ain't S'lome!" she exclaimed.

Her slow, placid mind had great difficulty in even the attempt to adjust itself. Things were happening at such a rate that it was quite useless to try to understand them. And in all her life things had never happened before.

The girl at the door had made no response. Salome's entire powers were at work to bring to her the strength to walk into that room where Mrs. Scudder had been sitting. She knew directly that Moore must be in that room.

In another moment she advanced a step. It did not seem necessary or worth while to make any reply to Mrs. Scudder. Indeed, she was hardly aware that the woman had spoken.

The girl extended her hand to push Mrs. Scudder from the doorway, which she almost filled.

"Oh, land!" cried the other, "you mustn't go in there, S'lome! He's a stranger; I'll tell you about it. It's awful

curious, 'n' 'tain't much we know. But where do you s'pose Nely is? I'm real worried. You 'ain't seen her, have you?"

Salome thrust Mrs. Scudder gently aside.

"I've seen Nely," she answered. She was looking at the still form on the bed.

"Oh, you have? There 'ain't nothin' happened to her, then?"

"No."

Salome advanced and sat down in the chair Mrs. Scudder had been sitting in. She leaned forward with her arms resting on the bedside, her eyes upon Moore's unresponsive face.

Mrs. Scudder had kept the lamp in her hand. She now stood with it raised somewhat, so that its light was shed upon the girl sitting there. She was looking at Salome.

In a moment she stepped forward softly and set the lamp upon the stand. Then she walked noiselessly from the room and sank into a chair in the darkened kitchen.

Tears were rolling down the woman's face. There was a strange pang in her heart.

She had never seen upon any face the look that was upon Salome's. For a brief time the sight of it took from her all bewilderment and curiosity. At first she could not ask herself how Salome had known this man was here, or how she had known him.

As Mrs. Scudder was trying to get her handkerchief from some obscure fold in her gown, and as in the endeavor the tears ceased to flow, she heard footsteps outside. She was conscious of a fleeting sense of impatience with her husband that he could continue to snore when she was the subject of so much emotion.

She gave up trying to find her pocket and her handkerchief, and went to the door, admitting Nely and Mrs. Gerry.

"I do declare!" cried Mrs. Scudder, helplessly, going back to her seat without thinking whether this new visitor would be seated. "It does seem 's if my mind was goin'," she continued,

Mrs. Gerry's face and figure seemed strangely composed as she also walked across the kitchen to the room her daughter had just entered. She carefully avoided glancing at Salome.

Mrs. Gerry had reached that age when she knew positively that she could not, with outward calmness, bear some things. And she knew now that she could not bear to see Salome's face.

She walked to the bedside, and for a moment bent over the bed. Then she went back and joined Mrs. Scudder.

"Do you know what has happened to him?" she asked. Her tone was calm; it was pitched too high, however.

Before Mrs. Scudder had done more than shake her head, Mrs. Gerry went on: "Nely told me all she knew as we were coming; but I thought you might have learned something more."

Mrs. Scudder shook her head again. Now she remarked that she s'posed this young man must be a friend.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gerry, promptly, and with an appearance of explaining everything. "We knew him in Florida. He was very kind to us. I thought a great deal of him. He had come out here to call on us. It's dreadful."

"It's jest as dretful 's it can be," responded Mrs. Scudder, "'n' I'm all upset with it. 'The doctor he's gone to telegraph round. He's goin' to telegraph to the girl he's engaged to. I s'pose she'll be comin' out here. I do hope we sh'll have strength to go through with it. I d' know whether he'll live or die. Dr. Sands said 'twan't no use to give no medicine. He said might 's well give medicine to a dead woodchuck. You know his way. I don't like that kind of a way in a doctor myself; but some folks think there ain't nobody like Dr. Sands."

Mrs. Scudder had a recurrence of a desire to reach her handkerchief. She was not in a teary state now, but she felt frustrated, and she could not tell how soon the tears might come again. She stood up and brought her skirt round with a violent movement, absolutely found the pocket

this time, and abstracted from it a piece of white cloth with a wide pink border.

"I'm sure I wish I could be as ca'm 's you are, Mis' Gerry," she said, with some reproach in her tone. "I did think I was likely to be 's ca'm 's 'most anybody, but my nerves are all kind of shook up, somehow."

Mrs. Gerry did not reply. She was standing so that she could see her daughter's figure with its head drooped forward towards the bed. With a revulsion of feeling, she now felt she must be where she could see Salome.

Mrs. Scudder's curiosity began to rise above her real sympathy and kindness. She thought that there were a good many things that she did not understand, and it seemed that she had a right to understand, since her family had been distinguished by finding that man lying insensible by the road-side. She didn't see how she could have her house turned into a hospital and everything going wrong, and she not able to make butter at her usual time, and likely 's not having to do without pies for days at a time—she didn't see how she could endure all this and not know the very ins and outs of the acquaintance of the Gerrys with that young man; and he engaged to another young woman who called him "My dearest," and who signed herself "Always your Portia."

And it was perfectly plain that Salome loved him.

Mrs. Scudder's sluggish heart almost thrilled at this wonderful complication; it also swelled somewhat with pride at the conviction which now suddenly came to her that her Nely must have known something; her Nely must have been able to keep a secret.

Nely, with skirts heavily wet up to her knees, was sitting in a chair and leaning her head against the wall. At first she had placed herself where she could see Salome as she sat by the bed in the next room. But immediately there came over her a sense that it was something like sacrilege for her to watch Salome.

She wondered how her mother could talk. She won-

dered how her father could lie there and sleep. To her the whole air was electrical.

Mrs. Gerry, standing upright, not thinking of sitting, her eyes on Salome's drooped head, was aware that some one was touching her.

She turned enough to see her hostess standing close to her. Mrs. Scudder nodded towards the girl sitting by the bed.

"Does she know he's engaged?" she whispered, loudly.

There was no reply and no movement from Mrs. Gerry.

"I seen a letter," went on Mrs. Scudder, quite carried away by the romantic interest of her subject, and by the possibilities and complications of it. "The doctor took it out of his pocket. There 'tis on the stand by the lamp. I jest looked at it. You know the doctor had to find out something' bout him, so 's to telegraph round. Oh, my!" here Mrs. Scudder's prominent eyes bulged out still more. "It's a reg'lar love-letter! I didn't know there was such love-letters only in novels. I hope Nely won't see it. I s'pose some folks take such notions as that 'bout love. It was put together real pretty 'n' interestin', too; 'twas real bright in some places. The doctor he's sent for that woman."

Here there was a very slight movement on Mrs. Gerry's part.

"I s'pose you know all about that woman?"

"I saw her in Florida."

Mrs. Gerry's effort in speaking was so visible that Nely, who at first had paid no attention to the two women, now sprang from her seat and pulled her mother's skirt.

"Do stop, mother!" she exclaimed.

Here Mrs. Gerry, who was really unable to stand any longer, turned to the nearest chair. She was thinking that she had believed Mrs. Scudder to be very kind-hearted; now she had a savage wish to do an injury to a woman who could torture in that way.

"Go 'n' change your clo'es this minute!" exclaimed Mrs. Scudder to Nely. "You'll git your death er cold!"

The speaker was provoked that she had been interrupted. The agitations of the evening were having the appearance of putting the easy-going nature out of temper. Mrs. Scudder was seriously tried with Mrs. Gerry. She confided to her husband later that she didn't know that Mis' Gerry was so kind of unfeelin'; but Mis' Gerry was always one of them ca'm kind.

The time crept on until it was midnight. As the clock struck, Mrs. Scudder, who had been dozing in her rocker, having suddenly desisted from any attempt to talk with Mrs. Gerry, rose and declared that she heard wheels.

Then Mrs. Gerry, who had not been dozing, answered that she guessed it was the wind 'in the chimney. Mrs. Scudder, now extremely irritable, resented this remark, and responded that she guessed she knew what was wind and what was wheels. Then she put her head back on the chair, and immediately went to sleep again.

Mrs. Gerry had drawn her chair near the door of the bedroom. For the last hour she had been virtually alone with her daughter, for Nely had at last gone up-stairs, overpowered, in spite of all, by the sleep that comes to healthy youth.

It was chilly now in these rooms. The sultry night had changed. The wind was blowing from the north, and the sky was clear and steel-blue. The insects of the summer night were silent, save that now and then a braver, stronger little creature gave a small, shrill pipe.

Mrs. Gerry sat there. Sometimes a rebellious questioning as to why this had come to her child rose in her mind. But she felt that such questioning was wicked. It had come. Should she ask why God did anything? Surely God was trying her daughter. Once she prayed fiercely that God might try her, torture her, if He would only spare Salome.

But immediately she suppressed that prayer. She must, rather, plead that God would enable Salome to bear her troubles in a way that would be for her eternal good.

Eternal good. That phrase took its place in the woman's thoughts. She must cling to that. It was all there was. If she could only bring Salome to think of it also. Salome was so keenly, so passionately alive to the present.

Once, overborne by her anxiety, Mrs. Gerry went to her daughter, who was still sitting with her arms resting on the side of the bed where Moore lay.

"Salome," whispered the mother.

The girl said "Yes," without moving from her position.

"Can't you let God help you?" At this question Salome looked up at her mother.

"I'm not thinking about God," she answered.

"But now, when you are suffering so—" said Mrs. Gerry. Salome turned back towards the bed.

"I am thinking of my love."

She extended her hand and touched with the tips of her fingers the lock of hair on Moore's forehead.

"God is nothing to me," she said.

Mrs. Gerry shuddered. She stood an instant close to the girl, her eyes strained as they gazed at her, her lips pressed closely together. Then she walked silently away and sat down in her old place.

God would not send suffering unless for some good purpose. God sometimes purified by fire.

Such sentences Mrs. Gerry repeated to herself, struggling in a dumb agony to make the words alive with a comforting meaning, rather than mere dead husks with no life in them.

Sometimes as she sat there her eyes rested on that square, flat, white object upon the stand. That was Portia Nuna-ly's letter to her lover. And her lover was the man whom Salome loved. Whether he lived or died, Salome must suffer. And Salome could suffer so much. And she was not one who would submit, and be reconciled, and perhaps consoled.

There was the sound of wheels at last. It was three o'clock. That must be Dr. Sands coming with the man he had sent for.

By this time Mrs. Scudder in her chair was as soundly sleeping as her husband was upon his lounge. Neither of them stirred.

Mrs. Gerry went to the door and opened it. In spite of all her strength of nerve she perceptibly shrank back when Miss Nunally stepped within the room.

Miss Nunally was very pale, and her lips were very red. There was a burning spark deep in each eye, and a subtle intensity in her whole aspect which made her presence indescribably effective to the plain Puritan woman who looked at her.

VI

THE ONE HE'S ENGAGED TO

MISS NUNALLY stood for the space of an instant where she had entered, with the outer door open, and the deep dusk of the early morning showing over the sky behind her. Mrs. Gerry was aware of a dull surprise that she should notice how clear the stars shone.

Portia had been holding a warm mantle about her shoulders, her bare, ringed hand closely grasping it. Now she dropped the mantle. She extended her hand, mechanically.

Mrs. Gerry felt a disinclination to touch the hand, reproving herself meanwhile that she should have that feeling.

"Isn't this the place?" asked the girl. "He is here?"

Mrs. Gerry framed an inaudible "Yes" upon her lips, and drew back a little.

Portia looked about her. Her gaze remained fixed upon the open bedroom door. Every line of her figure showed how tense she was.

"The telegram said: 'Badly hurt; come to Dwight Scudder's.' I did not lose any time. Is he—"

She was plainly unable to go on.

Mrs. Gerry pushed a chair towards the new-comer, who sat down in it. But she rose towards the woman, who seemed relaxing, and a tremor was taking its place. She made two or three aimless steps about the room. It was strange, Mrs. Gerry thought, that even now all Miss Nunally's movements were characterized by her old independent grace of motion.

The girl came close to the woman, and took hold of her arm.

"Is he alive?" she whispered.

Mrs. Gerry nodded.

"Then let me go to him. He is in there?" looking towards the open door.

The mother was thinking of her daughter. She was trying to arrange some way in which to shield her, although she knew perfectly how useless was such an attempt. She moved gently between her companion and the door.

"He will not know you," she said. "Don't go."

"Not know me?" with a slight emphasis on the last word. Then her face lighted as she continued, "Yes, he will know me. Because I love him so well he must know me."

Mrs. Gerry shrank somewhat as she heard these words and the tone in which they were spoken. At that moment she knew that she had not before given Portia Nunally credit for a certain capability.

When she had been told that Portia was engaged to Moore, she had thought that for some reason it suited Portia to be engaged to that young man. Portia was quite accustomed to engagements—not that Moore was not one who might easily be loved.

But from this moment Mrs. Gerry's attitude of mind towards Miss Nunally underwent a change—a change quite as likely to be wrong as the attitude she had known before. But Mrs. Gerry could not be aware of that fact. She could not, from the very nature of things, have any true conception of a nature like Miss Nunally's.

Portia pressed gently forward until Mrs. Gerry had stepped aside. Why should she uselessly try to keep those two girls apart?

Portia paused abruptly when she was where she could look into the room. She saw Moore lying there, and Salome sitting by him. Salome was leaning forward as she had been doing, but her head was now bowed on the arms which rested on the bed.

A crimson so deep that it was almost purple rose up to Portia's brow, and then she became very pale. The spark

in her eyes grew more intense ; her short upper lip, which so often had a scornful aspect, was now drawn down sharply, giving her whole face a look so foreign to it that it almost seemed another face.

After that instant's abrupt pause she walked into the room and up to the foot of the bed. She placed her hands on the foot-board, but lightly placed them there, as if she were resolved to sustain herself upright unaided, whatever the strain upon her.

She looked for a long, absorbed moment at Moore's face as it lay so peacefully on the pillow. She drew her breath in sharply, her countenance still retaining that drawn expression.

Has it ever been stated of this woman that she knew, better than most, the value of an emotion ? She knew when to give way to it.

She remained standing there after she had ceased looking at Moore. But she was now gazing at Salome, who was not yet conscious of this presence which had arrived almost noiselessly.

Miss Nunally's face changed from all softness to that peculiar hard, steel-like appearance which a blond face can take on so much more strongly than any other.

But her movements were as gentle as possible as she walked round to the girl by the bed and bent over her.

Salome started up quickly, glanced at Portia, braced herself to stand quietly, and then said, in a low voice :

"So you have come."

It was a very strange thing which happened then.

The instant that Portia's eyes rested on Salome's face every particle of that hard look, that something like tigerish combativeness, vanished.

"Oh !" murmured Portia, and the two girls gazed at each other intently.

It was at this time that Mrs. Scudder, perhaps moved by a sense of the happening of more unusual things, stirred uneasily in her chair, and then rose, not really awake, but in an awakening state.

She gazed hazily at Mrs. Gerry. Then, hearing Mr. Scudder snoring on the lounge, she remarked that men always would sleep through everything. For her part, she wished that she was made up so, but—

At this point she interrupted herself to ask :

“Has he come to?”

“No.”

Mrs. Scudder rubbed her eyes.

“I d’ know but we better try mustard ag’in on the back of his neck,” she said.

Mrs. Gerry made no response to this. She felt that she could not spare any of her strength for useless conversations with any one.

Mrs. Scudder advanced to the clock and scrutinized it.

“Mercy sake !” she cried. “It’s past three. I d’ know but I must have lost myself.” She glanced at Mrs. Gerry. “P’raps,” she went on, “if I mix a teaspoonful of cayenne with the mustard it ’ll bring him to. It does seem ’s if we ought to be doin’ something. Was he subject to any kind of spells, Mrs. Gerry, when you knew him in Floridy? Dr. Sands ain’t above mistakes more ’n the rest of us. Mebby it’s a spell he’s got. You remember old Major Lucas that lived in the aide of the Dillon neighborhood, don’t you, Mis’ Gerry?”

Mrs. Gerry sat down. She acknowledged that she remembered Major Lucas.

“You rec’lect them spells he uset to have? He’d lay for hours ’thout knowin’ nothin’, ’n’ then he’d come to ’n’ go to work ’s if nothin’ ’d happened. Dr. Sands don’t always know. I s’pose he’s jest like other doctors, ’n’ wants to cut somebody open. He wants to cut that young man’s head open. He’s sent for that Boston man. I always did go ag’in’st operations. I guess I’ll try the mustard ’n’ cayenne. You look real tired, Mis’ Gerry. Why don’t you lop right down in this chair ’n’ shet your eyes jest a minute? I’m goin’ to make a cup of green tea. If there’s goin’ to be an operation here green tea won’t be none too strong to brace me up.”

As Mrs. Scudder finished her remarks she walked to the door of the bedroom.

She uttered an exclamation, and then put her hand over her mouth as if to keep back a stream of cries of astonishment that were ready to burst forth at sight of the stranger there.

After a moment she turned towards Mrs. Gerry, bending over her and whispering hoarsely, "Is she the girl he's engaged to?"

"Yes."

"I declare! I must have lost myself, or I sh'd have heard her come. Ain't it interestin'? Be they both in love with him?"

As there was no reply to this question, Mrs. Scudder repeated that it was the most interestin' thing she'd ever heard of. It was more interestin' than when Lyddy Mann and Silas Loring had been married jest as Silas was breathin' his last breath in consumption. Lyddy had made the prettiest widow that had ever been seen in the North meetin'-house.

Mrs. Gerry drew a long breath as the sound of wheels was now unmistakably heard down the road. The wheels were, as Mrs. Scudder said, "jest tearin' along the road," and they came into the yard.

Dr. Sands entered quickly. He was followed by another man, whose movements were so deliberate by contrast that they appeared slow. Dr. Sands walked directly into the bedroom, making an instant's pause as he saw the two girls standing by the bed. He knew Salome. The other must be that one to whom he had wired. He was directly interested in her. But why the deuce was Salome Gerry there? Had she come with her mother? Women were always sending for each other.

He nodded at Salome. He said respectfully to Portia, "I suppose you are Miss Nunally?"

Salome walked away and went and stood by her mother. It was plainly not she who had any right as belonging to

Moore. Miss Nunally only bowed her assent to the doctor's question. Then she asked, "May we hope? Tell me the truth quickly—quickly."

As the man answered, he was saying to himself that he was devilish sorry for that young fellow. A girl like this now—

Aloud he said that nothing could be told yet. Still he believed that there was much reason to hope—but the brain had been injured.

Here he was interrupted by Portia, who said, eagerly:

"He must have the best skill—the best. Pardon me, but you know that is absolutely imperative."

"Certainly; I have sent for the best. There is no man in the country who stands higher in this branch of the profession than Dr. Jennings."

He looked at the other doctor, who had come into the little room and was standing with his hands behind him, his eyes upon the figure on the bed.

Dr. Jennings bowed absently. Then he glanced at Portia, withdrew his eyes, glanced again, then said that if the ladies would now kindly withdraw, except the one in a black gown whom he had just seen in the other room— He did not appear to think it necessary to finish his sentence.

The woman in the black gown, of course, was Mrs. Gerry.

When this selection of the doctor from Boston was made known to Mrs. Scudder she had a feeling of resentment, which, however, she quickly smothered. She did allow herself to say that if she hadn't been as ready as could be to make mustard plasters, she shouldn't have thought strange of what that Boston doctor had said. And she guessed they'd better go up-stairs, them that wa'n't wanted. She'd be ready to tell Mis' Gerry where everything was if they wanted anything. She had some green salve that was considered the very best—

"Mother," said an imperative young voice from the stairway.

When Nely called her mother in that manner Mrs. Scudder did not delay in her response.

It was early daylight now. Mr. Scudder had risen hastily from the lounge, and had at first manifested some shame-faced signs of remorse at having so undeniably slept. He went to the barn, after having made inquiries and professed his readiness to do anything he could do.

Now the farm-house seemed to bear upon its very roof-shingles signs that some strange thing was going on within its quiet walls.

Mrs. Gerry noiselessly obeyed the requests of the surgeon. Once Dr. Jennings said that he was sorry there was no hospital nearer.

It was almost the only remark he made, save to give his brief orders to Mrs. Gerry or to Dr. Sands.

The woman stood unflinchingly by as Moore's inert length was put upon a long, raised board. Her hand was steady, her face sternly attentive. She obeyed as an intelligent soldier obeys, instantly and without visible questioning. But all the time she was possessed by one thought; so possessed by it that she even reproved herself for a sort of unfeeling quality, because she could only think of her daughter as waiting up-stairs. Was it strange that this mother should think that Salome ought not to suffer so? That it was worse for Salome to suffer than for another? Would any one have called this woman cold as she saw the gleaming shears clip away still more closely Moore's hair, as she watched the seemingly deliberate but really rapid movements as the skin was made "surgically clean"; as she held the basin; as she saw the appalling shining of strange instruments? Perhaps to do this does require a certain hardness, but it is a hardness which is worth far more than all that soft susceptibility which is often so captivating—a hardness which the world can ill spare, and which might almost be called the backbone, the real stamina of genuine tenderness.

The Boston surgeon spoke rarely. His words seemed to

drop from his mouth; sometimes these words were mere technical terms addressed to Dr. Sands, or a common phrase of instruction to Mrs. Gerry.

Gradually, and to her own great surprise, the woman became deeply interested in watching the operation; in noting the wonderful skill and deftness which never made a false movement; where the hands followed an apparently unerring judgment with unswerving accuracy. For a space she even forgot Moore as Moore, and viewed him as "a case."

She saw the bones of the skull lifted, and her eyes rested on that mysterious matter wherein she had been told that thought dwelt, or where it came, or—here Mrs. Gerry's usually clear mind suddenly clouded over in the wondering and the questioning that came to her. She felt that she knew nothing. But how much more did this man of marvellous skill know? She was sure that he stopped short at materialism. She could not tell why she jumped at that conclusion. Yes, this man with the deep eyes that probed into the very mysteries and holies of life must be hedged in by materialism. Death, disintegration, ended all for him.

Never before had Mrs. Gerry felt such a rebellion, such a struggle for solid ground whereon to rest her feet with utter firmness. She was frightened at the glimpse of what to her was a godless chaos. But the mood passed almost immediately. The habitual thought and belief of years, and, above all, the strong tendency towards faith with which she was born, and which she had systematically cherished all her life, came directly to her aid.

She believed. That was the old phrase which now stamped itself anew upon her brain.

When the strain was over and the two doctors, with Mr. Scudder's help, had placed Moore on the bed again, Mrs. Gerry walked quickly out of doors.

She longed to be under the sky; to see the high pastures with their gray rocks. Somehow those rocks always comforted her. They always looked the same, and they were

hers, hers by the right of years of love and acquaintance.

She went down behind the barn where no one could see her. But first she returned to the house to put on her "rubbers" and to wrap a shawl about her, for the wind was still blowing clearly from the north.

The huge, blackened barn sheltered her from observation from the house or road.

She walked over the short, wet grass, holding up her skirts carefully, and yet not knowing that she did so. She was murmuring words of prayer, her eyes fixed on the pasture rising towards the north.

She was praying for Salome. After every few words of intense petition she would feel that she ought, perhaps, to reprove herself for almost seeming to dictate in what way the Lord should bless her child.

"But only if it seems best to Thee!"

After a few moments she stopped her walk and leaned her arms on the fence. She was beginning to feel a deadly weariness. She fought it off, however.

What if Moore should die? That would be the simplest answer to the questions of the situation. At this moment Mrs. Gerry could not help thinking that for any young person to die was glorious gain. It was to be taken from the unsolvable perplexities of the world. If Salome should die her mother was sure that in time she should feel more and more a thankfulness that at last the child was safe. God would judge leniently as to the tendencies His own hand had placed in Salome's soul. And here again Mrs. Gerry started away from the path of thought she was entering. She had times of fearing that her very tenderness of judgment towards her daughter might be a sort of wrong towards others. She often recalled the case of a young man who had been condemned for murder, who even confessed his crime. His mother had clung to him with a piteous strength. She told every one that her boy was different; she knew her boy better than anybody else could know him.

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She supposed her boy had done that deed, "since he said he done it"; but it was different; it was not so bad as other murders. She went mad, explaining and justifying, and believing in her boy's real tenderness. She never stopped explaining until her poor crazed brain ceased to think.

"She did know him better," was Mrs. Gerry's thought now. "And in just that way must God know all of us better."

Then she shrank back again from that thought which might lead to a lax judgment. People must be judged according to their deeds. That was all the way there was to judge them.

"I must be very tired," at length said Mrs. Gerry, speaking aloud. "If I could sleep twelve hours, things would look different to me."

She lifted herself from her heavy leaning against that top rail of the fence. She gathered up her skirts again.

As she turned to go towards the house Miss Nunally came round the end of the barn. She had no shawl wrapped about her, and no overshoes on her feet. She looked so wretched and so old that Mrs. Gerry, preoccupied as she was, noticed her appearance. But the woman was afraid that she hated her just now. And yet the something there was in Portia's personal presence instantly asserted itself.

Portia paused at the other side of the fence.

"I beg your pardon," she said, in an indifferent voice. "I could not bear it in the house. And now," looking about her, "I cannot bear it here."

"We have to bear things," said Mrs. Gerry in her most prim manner.

"Do we?"

Portia's eyes, singularly faded in this morning light, looked vacantly at her companion.

"Yes, we do. We all have dreadful things to bear. I don't suppose a man or woman ever lived who did not have some dreadful thing to bear some time in his life."

"Very likely," was the response. "But I don't know that that is any comfort."

Silence on Mrs. Gerry's part. She hesitated, and then she was about to turn away.

"You need not go to the house on account of Salome," said Portia. "She is asleep. She is as soundly asleep as if she were only ten years old."

Mrs. Gerry looked incredulous. Portia went on.

"I haven't yet suffered quite enough to sleep, though that is one of the blessings I used to command at will. I think I am losing my blessings."

Miss Nunally now turned away and sat down on a stone, which had tumbled from the wall that began at the bars.

"You ought to have put on rubbers," said Mrs. Gerry.

No reply.

"And a shawl," added Mrs. Gerry.

Portia made an impatient movement with one shoulder.

"I think nature is insulting," she said. "Look at that sky! I suppose God is laughing at us behind that sky; that is, if there is a God."

"Miss Nunally!"

"Mrs. Gerry?"

"You are very wicked."

"I am very miserable."

After a slight hesitation Mrs. Gerry let down a rail of the bars and crawled through the aperture. She took off her shawl and put it over the girl sitting there.

"The wind is so cold," she said.

She was going up towards the house when Portia's voice made her pause.

"I know about Salome," she said, incisively.

"About Salome?"

"Yes; she told me what she had done. I'm not condemning her."

Mrs. Gerry stood without motion awaiting what else should be said.

"I wanted to tell you that suffering doesn't make me good. And I am suffering. Oh yes," with a slight, uncontrollable movement, "I am suffering. You need not

trouble yourself to try to answer me. Only you will 'make allowances'—that's what you call it, isn't it?—if I'm not particularly good. I don't care a bit about being good. I never did. I don't care a bit about anything—only for that man who is in the house there, and who cannot care for anybody now. I care for him."

As she talked a defiant animation had come to her aspect. Her eyes were no longer faded. Her face changed so much when she said "I care for him" that Mrs. Gerry thought it must be impossible for Moore not to respond—and he was engaged to her. That was enough for Mrs. Gerry; only she felt that she could never reckon on what Salome would do under any circumstances.

Miss Nunally rose. She wrapped the shawl closely about her and began walking aimlessly over the wet grass.

"It's a very foolish thing to love when love brings unhappiness," she said. "I have never meant to love save for happiness. Don't you think that's an excellent rule, Mrs. Gerry? But I see you don't. You are one of the rigid kind. I'm talking because I have sat in the house there silent until I was ready to do any dreadful thing. It hurts to talk, but one likes to be hurt. One likes to cry, 'Oh, how much I can suffer!' Mrs. Gerry," suddenly advancing upon the woman who had walked a few yards to the shelter of the barn that the wind might not chill her, "Mrs. Gerry, what did the doctors say to you?"

Mrs. Gerry tried to reply promptly.

"They spoke about Mr. Moore's youth. They told how great a percentage recovered."

"A percentage! The brutes!" She walked again, and then stopped in front of Mrs. Gerry. "I asked them, and they gave me some words—I don't know what they were. Here, take your shawl. I am going on up into the pasture, and I am not cold. I have a fire in my heart. And Salome is asleep."

Portia laughed a little as she made this last statement.

Mrs. Gerry watched the girl as she went away towards

the upland field, springing forward as if there were superabounding, defiant life still in her frame.

But in truth Portia walked so in order that she might carry out in her physical appearance the fierce resentment that was in her soul.

Mrs. Gerry went back to the house. She found Mrs. Scudder going about the kitchen in large cloth shoes that she might make no noise. She told Mrs. Gerry that both doctors were still in the bedroom. She said that the Boston man was going to send out two trained nurses; "nusses" was the term she used. She also said that if trained nusses was as partic'lar about their victuals as she had heard they was, she should try to bear it, but she s'posed it would come some hard. And she had been goin' to have company. And did them nusses wear uniforms? She had been told that they did.

Mrs. Gerry did not know. Mrs. Scudder was evidently very much excited. Her mild, prominent blue eyes were so prominent now that it was painful to look at them. She was pale, and a slight tendency towards hanging down in the underlip was now much increased.

Nely was cooking some bacon in a frying-pan on the stove. She often looked at her mother in a way that showed that she felt acutely that that underlip ought not to hang in that way. She said now that she had no doubt that trained nurses were exactly like other people, and she hoped that they did wear a uniform; she hoped it was red; she hoped it was plaid; she hoped they had short hair, and that they knew all the ways there were to give people medicine. She was glad, for her part, that there were at least two coming; she would like it better if there were three. But she hated that long young man in there.

"Nely!" said her mother, in a hoarse whisper of disapproval, "he's dretful sick."

"Oh, I know that," still more recklessly, lifting up a piece of bacon on her fork and slapping it down in the bubbling fat so that the cat, sitting close to her, received a drop of

the scalding stuff; "I know that well enough, but I hate him all the same. I don't love a person just because he's sick or well. And that girl that's engaged to him that's come here; where's she going to stay, I should like to know?—that girl with that kind of an upper lip ready to curl at anything—that girl who says eyether and nyether—where's she going to stay?"

Nely, with her cheeks burning, faced round with a knife and fork held belligerently.

"I told Nely she mustn't git excited," apologetically remarked Mrs. Scudder, who was trying to set the table for a meal that was neither breakfast nor supper; "'n' I told her we'd got to ask that young lady to breakfast, if 'tis breakfast, 'n' them doctors, too. It jest happens that we ain't got nothin' in the house to speak of. I was goin' to cook up a lot to-day for company 't we was expectin' to-morrer. I've got to git word to 'em some way."

Mrs. Scudder, notwithstanding her general appearance of mild calmness, was one who could become very much flustered; and she knew extremely little when she was flustered. Her husband had been known to say that he'd ruther have an earthquake any time than to have mar git flustered. But then Mr. Scudder had had no experience of earthquakes. He could not tell but that they might be even more discomposing than was his wife when she was disturbed.

Mrs. Gerry went noiselessly up the stairs. In the little south chamber she found Salome lying on the bed. She was still sleeping. Flung upon a chair were Miss Nunally's wrap and hat. The window was open, and the branches of an old cherry-tree brushed against the screen. Mrs. Gerry stood a moment to look at the girl, then she went away as silently as she had come. In youth nature stands ready to assert itself like a beneficent power. The mother was sure that Salome had not slept soundly for many a day and night, but now the time had come.

Mrs. Gerry went back to the kitchen. Nely had put the frying-pan on the back of the stove to keep warm while she

tried to set the table. Her mother hovered over her meanwhile, her lip drooping more and more.

Mrs. Scudder looked at Mrs. Gerry as she said pointedly that she didn't know, she was sure, how many plates they needed, and she was nearly positive there wa'n't bread enough to go 'round. She had meant to make biscuit, but somehow she couldn't seem to git at it. She had took up the creamy-tartar, 'n' had put it down somewhere, 'n' now she couldn't find it. She pumped a pailful of water, and then turned it into the sink.

"Mother," said Nely, "I wish you'd go to bed; I wish you'd go and sit in the parlor; I wish you'd keep out of this kitchen; and I don't care a cent if there ain't bread enough to go 'round. There are potatoes enough, anyway, and crackers. I don't want anything but crackers and coffee; and I'll have a cup of coffee strong enough to take my head off."

Mrs. Scudder smiled in feeble admiration. She glanced at Mrs. Gerry, who was rearranging the plates on the table and bringing dishes from the pantry.

"I'd know what I should do 'thout Nely," she exclaimed. "But I wish I could make out how many there is to breakfast. We ain't got nothin' fit. If I could find the creamy-tartar—"

"Mother," cried Nely, pausing to look round, after having brought the platter for the bacon, "will you go out of this kitchen? You know you're flustered."

"Well, I know I be," was the response. Mrs. Scudder did not leave the room, but she sat down and vaguely watched her daughter and Mrs. Gerry as they finished the preparations for the meal.

It was the Boston doctor who came to join them, leaving Dr. Sands with the patient. Nely quite hated him, because, after chopping any one up, as she said to herself, he could par-take so heartily of bacon and potatoes, and coffee and milk.

While they were all still at the table Miss Nunally appeared in the doorway, having just returned from the past-

ure. Nely had put a plate and a chair for this unwelcome guest, but she would not be gracious enough to make any sign now.

Dr. Jennings rose and stepped to the vacant chair, taking it from the table and motioning to the girl in the doorway. She advanced, although her countenance showed no sign that she had seen his command.

"Drink milk," he said. He took the pitcher of milk, poured her a glass, and stood near until she had raised it to her lips.

Perhaps he would have been amused if he had seen the ferocious glance Nely gave him. But he resumed his place and calmly went on with his repast.

An hour later Dr. Jennings started to the station. He said that he knew just the nurses to send out. He would come himself within twenty-four hours. He gave some murmured advice to Dr. Sands as the two stood on the back piazza. Nely, washing dishes as noiselessly as she could at the sink near the open door, heard the Boston doctor say that it was a perfect case of— Here she lost the word. "A good illustration of —" Nely dropped a plate with a loud splash into the water.

Those two men standing there with their hands in their pockets seemed like brutes to her. She was glad when only Dr. Sands was left, and her father was driving the other towards the station.

Mrs. Scudder, a little steadied by coffee and a somewhat bountiful meal, was not quite so pendulous as to the underlip, but she had not yet come out of her fluster. She had poured what there was left of the milk in the pitcher into a pan of bonny-clabber, and was now standing in the middle of the room bewailing this deed.

Mr. Scudder's last remark to his daughter before he had driven away had been to ask her if she couldn't somehow work it so's to git her mother to se' down somewheres till she come out of her fluster. He said he didn't want all the victuals in the house mixed up. Things were mixed enough

there now, 'n' he didn't know how they sh'd come out when them nusses come. There was one thing—Nely 'd have to leave school for a spell ; for what with a man with his skull cut open, 'n' mar flustered, 'n' trained nusses, he guessed their hands 'd be about full.

Nely did succeed in inducing her mother to go into the dark, close parlor and lie down on the narrow horse-hair sofa.

Mrs. Scudder submitted now to the guidance of the girl. She told Nely that if she could only keep on that sofa she could most always have a nap there.

It turned out this morning that she could keep on it, though the couch certainly did not look as if she could do so. In five minutes she was asleep, and Nely and Mrs. Gerry, greatly relieved by her absence, "did up the work" rapidly and effectively.

By noon it appeared that the news, in more or less distorted fashion, had spread over the neighborhood. Slow-going horses dragging hay carts or open wagons, wherein were men in more or less faded blue overalls, stopped occasionally in the road in front of the house. The men slowly climbed out of these vehicles and came around to the back door, looking solemnly all over the house as they came.

It was Mrs. Gerry who met them. Each one had heard a different version ; each one was agape with curiosity.

Mrs. Gerry replied alike to them all. She said that Mr. Scudder had picked up a young man on his way to the village. The young man was unconscious. They didn't know how badly he was hurt. Dr. Sands was there now. They were going to have two trained nurses. No, they didn't know how he was hurt. They didn't know whether he'd get well or not.

"But they say you was acquainted with him?"

"Yes ; we knew him in Florida."

They all had to go away with this information, which was, in their eyes, no information at all. Some of them caught glimpses of Miss Nunally.

"Who was that strange gal?"

"She was engaged to the young man. She had been sent for immediately."

"Oh! Kinder tough for her, ain't it? Was she all ready to be married?"

Mrs. Gerry thought that it was true that Miss Nunally was all ready to be married.

One man went so far as to ask particularly if Miss Nunally had got her wedding-dress.

Mrs. Gerry did not know. He then informed her that his wife, having been told by a neighbor who had already called at the Scudders' for information that a strange gal was there, had made him promise to find out if the wedding-gown had been made.

Nely overheard these words. She paused behind Mrs. Gerry and looked over that woman's shoulder at the man who was asking for this information. There was a malicious spark in her eye as she said: "There's the girl now, Mr. Lincoln. You ask her. She can tell you. Then there'll be no mistake about it."

The big, heavily moving farmer turned slowly about. His eyes almost became set in his head as they fixed themselves upon Portia Nunally advancing from the barn, where she had been in her restless movements about the place.

VII

TWO GIRLS

"I DON'T care what she says to him," said Nely, grinning as she watched Mr. Lincoln going ponderously towards Miss Nunally. "She'll wither him all up, and it'll do him a lot of good to be withered. I declare I must see something going on besides doctors cutting people's heads open."

Nely passed out into the open porch, and stood there leaning against a post. She could not withhold her admiration from Miss Nunally as the girl paused in response to a gesture made by Mr. Lincoln; but Nely's admiration was saturated with the quick and unreasoning hatred that comes so often to youth.

She had instantly decided in her own mind that Miss Nunally had no right to be engaged to that young man in the bedroom. That young man belonged to Salome—that is, if Salome wanted him to belong to her. In the bottom of her heart Nely hoped that Salome did not want him. She felt sure that it would make matters simpler and easier in every way if Salome should scorn him. But, perhaps, he was going to die; that solving of the affair would simplify things still more. Nely, in the great hardness of her young heart, thought it would be a good thing if that man died, and there was an end to it all in that way. Yes, he might far better die. What a curious thing it was that those two girls, Salome and Miss Nunally, were in love with him. Yes, they certainly were in love. How interesting they must be to themselves! Nely's mind at this point suddenly flashed off to the conclusion that Miss Nunally, should Moore die,

would be chief mourner, since Miss Nunally was the one to whom Dr. Sands had telegraphed.

Portia was now standing before Mr. Lincoln and looking at him. He was dully aware that he had never before seen a woman in the least like this. There was something about her that made his small eyes brighten as he gazed. And some dim sense of her insolence stung him somewhat. But it was interesting to see her. Of course she must be a bad woman somehow, for Matthew Lincoln had been instructed for the last thirty years by his wife that it was bad women who were by far the most likely to be interesting. Mr. Lincoln was positively sure, by the light of this bringing up, that his wife was not a bad woman, since she was not in the least interesting.

"I hope you're 's well 's could be expected," at last remarked the man. He had had a kind of hope that his companion would speak first, and thus open the way to a conversation; but he was greatly mistaken in this hope.

"Thank you," said Portia. She did not go away, as she might have done. She stood there easily, looking at the man. She was beginning to be conscious of a slight degree of thankfulness for any kind of a diversion. She was tired of that horrible dead level of suffering. She was not fitted to suffer. She had no doubt that some people were fitted to suffer. She wondered calmly what made this man's face so purple, since it was a cool day, and why did his left eyelid twitch so before he spoke. She should think his wife would go mad with seeing that dreadful twitch every day of her life.

Mr. Lincoln was now divided between two emotions: a regret that he had addressed this girl, and a desire to continue to stand there and gaze at her.

"I understand," he began. Here he had a strong wish that he had taken his whip with him when he left his cart. The feel of his whip in his right hand was an accustomed and much needed stimulant to his mental faculties. He was also thinking that probably there were "lots

of gals jest like this one all round in the thick settled places."

"I understand," he began again, "that the man that's ben hurt—cause unknown"—this phrase spoken somewhat proudly—"was your beau."

"I beg your pardon," said Portia.

That word "beau" always made her ill, she had once told Salome. It was a word calculated to produce a disastrous effect upon her whenever she heard it.

Mr. Lincoln did not know why she begged his pardon, but he laboriously repeated that he had understood that the man who had been hurt—cause unknown—was her beau. He gained courage, with this repetition, to make an addition to his remarks. He said his wife was prevented by rheumatism from coming over with him. He interpolated the explanation that the rheumatics had been greatly aggravated by her going "out in the popple swamp to pick dangle-berries."

"Oh," said Portia.

"Yes," said Mr. Lincoln, with his eyes what the old novels used to call "glued" to the girl's face, "popple swamps is no place for old women with rheumatics."

Mr. Lincoln sometimes, when sufficiently removed from his wife's presence, greatly enjoyed speaking of her as an old woman.

He now had a fast-growing sense that he was giving himself up to what seemed to him a violent admiration of Miss Nunally's complexion. All the "women folks" whom he habitually saw had freckles or moth-patches on their faces. He thought that there could not be a woman whose face was not freckled. But here was one whose skin was—Mr. Lincoln staggered mentally when he came to try to find a comparison.

And to look at Portia Nunally gave the hulking, elderly, bovine creature standing near her an almost exhilarating sense of dissipation. He could not understand it. But then it was a long time now since Mr. Lincoln had tried to un-

derstand anything; and he seemed to remember that when he had formerly tried he had never succeeded.

He was wondering now what he had been saying. Again he wished that he had his whip in his right hand.

Oh, he was saying something about his wife's rheumatics. But there did not seem to be anything more to add on that subject. He did not know but that he ought to go out to his cart now. If he only had his whip!

He did not wish to go home without finding out something about that wedding-dress. So much hung on that, in Mrs. Lincoln's mind.

"It must be dretful hard to bear," he now remarked.

And again Portia said:

"I beg your pardon," and again he repeated his words.

His face grew more purple, and his eyelid twitched more markedly than before.

"I mean to have your beau hurt so sudden—cause unknown."

"Yes," said Portia.

The girl was finding an enjoyment in the embarrassment of the man before her. She was wishing cruelly that she might make some one suffer. It is often true that to suffer one's self is strangely an incentive towards causing suffering. But she was beginning to weary of this creature. He was too stupid. At first, as a type, she thought that he might amuse her. But nothing could amuse her any more.

What a mistake she had made in allowing herself to love so deeply! To love, save in some fleeting abandonment of ardor, was surely to be wretched. There was always in loving the reverse side, the side of wretchedness. The reverse side was what she had intended to avoid; and she had hitherto succeeded very well in this intention. But somehow now she found herself plunged into an intolerable misery. She was too epicurean in taste and temperament to be able to bear this. When she had reached this stage in her confused thoughts a rush of tenderness for her lover came over her, and she yielded herself up to it.

Meanwhile her face, excellently schooled when she willed, showed only that easy control which is so near the verge of insolence.

"My wife," began Mr. Lincoln, who was now seized with a fear that the girl would leave him before he had found out what he must find out, "she is quite a hand for clo'es."

"Quite a hand for clothes?" said Portia, slightly amused.

"Yes. She wanted to know, bein' such a hand for clo'es, whether you'd got your weddin'-dress. They couldn't tell me to the house here," jerking his head towards the building behind him.

"They couldn't tell you at the house?" asked Portia, with a gentle solicitude of manner.

"No," replied her companion, "they didn't know. 'N' my wife she said the last thing 'fore I left that she hoped I'd find out 'bout the weddin'-dress. She's known two or three gals that had beaus 'n' expected to be married, 'n' the day was set, 'n' something happened. One of the fellers was killed blarstin' out rock. She felt so bad she couldn't git over it. She was kinder pindlin' any way; 'n' she died in jest three weeks; 'n' she was laid out in her weddin'-gown. She had as large a funeril 's I ever remember to have attended. Folks, you see, was natchrally interested in her, 'n' they come from over beyond the Far Corners. They had three ministers there, 'n' the full choir of the church sung. 'Twas an' affectin' occasion."

Mr. Lincoln was so carried away with the memory of that funeral that for the moment he forgot to be embarrassed.

He was brought to himself, however, by the cool persistence of the gaze Portia fixed upon him. She began now to have a violent dislike towards him. His reference to that girl who had been laid out in her wedding-gown made her shudder with horror. She could never bear any reference to the dread paraphernalia of death. It made her angry and it made her afraid.

Mr. Lincoln moved uneasily. He wished he could go

away now. There was his horse dragging the cart slowly about the yard in his search for grass. He wanted to make a rush for his horse, but, as he had never yet in his life made a rush for anything, it was manifestly impossible for him to begin now. He felt the blood come up to his head. That gaze made him have the feeling, in some unaccountable way, as if he were being lashed and stung with a whip.

Presently Portia turned and walked away. Mr. Lincoln stood just where she had left him for a moment. As soon as he could he went towards his horse, which had reached the clump of lilacs by the wood-house.

At the lilacs he became aware that Nely had joined him. She said that she was afraid that the animal would trample on some hollyhocks growing there.

Mr. Lincoln reached forward and got his whip in his hand. His face directly cleared somewhat.

Nely was laughing. He thought resentfully that Nely was always a "sassy gal." She hadn't been brought up right. He mounted his cart and braced his feet so that he could keep his balance. Then he bethought himself of the fact that he had not found out about the wedding-gown, and that he must go home and face his wife in his ignorance.

Mrs. Lincoln prided herself upon knowing particulars which eluded nearly every one else. When she had first heard that a stranger had been hurt; that he was lying at Dwight Scudder's, and that Dr. Sands had sent for the girl to whom the young man was engaged, her mind had immediately flown to the subject of the wedding-dress. It might possibly occur that another girl would be laid out in that garment. If it should happen in that way, Mrs. Lincoln knew that she should regret more than ever that she had made an untimely visit to the popple swamp, and thus aggravated her rheumatics.

Mr. Lincoln backed his horse and then turned it, and then shouted, "Whoa!" standing firmly on his feet all the time. But he was far from standing firmly on his mental footing.

"Nely," he said, stooping over towards the girl and speaking in a sepulchral whisper, "I do wish you could somehow git so's to know if she," a backward motion of his whip in the direction taken by Miss Nunally, "has got her weddin'-gown."

Nely laughed openly.

"Oh, I guess you'll have to wait to know that," she said. "I wouldn't ask her no more than I'd cut out my tongue."

Mr. Lincoln's vast purple face showed his dejection and disappointment. He gathered the lines into a still firmer hold.

"Wall," he said, "mebby my wife 'll be able to come over by to-morrer."

"Oh, I hope she can come!" exclaimed Nely. "Bring her over, and let her ask Miss Nunally. You had a good time asking Miss Nunally, didn't you?"

But Mr. Lincoln did not reply. His eyes were fixed upon Miss Nunally, who was walking about in the orchard.

"What is it 'bout that young feller's knowin' the Gerys?" he asked. "Ain't things kind o' mixed up? I hope S'lome ain't goin' to be disappointed. I did hear something said 'bout her havin' been disappointed. There ain't nothin' to that story, is there?"

"Nothing," said Nely, with decision.

Mr. Lincoln was so much more clear in his mind since he had his whip in his hand that he was thinking of asking more questions, and was even ready, as he told himself, to "tackle that other gal again."

Before he had decided what inquiry to make the screen door of the kitchen opened, and Mrs. Scudder came out with a great appearance of haste. Nely looked at her mother critically, that she might decide if there were still symptoms of fluster.

"I do wish," said Mrs. Scudder, coming to the cart and taking hold of a wheel that she might lean on it—"I do wish you'd go over to the deepo for the evening train. Dr.

Sands says them nusses 'll most likely come on that train, 'n' Dwight he's gone with the Boston doctor, 'n' he's got an awful lot to do. It'll be a great 'commydation if you'll go."

"Nusses?" repeated Mr. Lincoln. "I didn't know 's you was goin' to have 'um. They had one over to Livingstone's when his wife was sick. I ain't no opinion of them—'n' they come so high, too."

"I've heard they were high," responded Mrs. Scudder, "but that ain't our lookout. Will you go to the deepo, do you think?"

"I'll go, Mrs. Scudder," said a voice behind the group. "I can get Mr. Norton's horse and carriage."

It was Salome who spoke. They all turned and looked at her, Mr. Lincoln in a scrutinizing manner, for, as he was thinking, his wife would be sure to ask as to Salome's appearance. She would want to tell Mrs. Hill. To Mr. Lincoln's eyes Salome looked much the same as usual.

"You can't drive Mr. Norton's horse more'n you can fly," said Mrs. Scudder.

"Yes, I can," was the quiet response. "I have driven it several times. I'll go for the nurses, Mr. Lincoln."

Nely saw her mother's lip begin to droop, and she took her mother's arm and unceremoniously walked her into the house.

Salome did not linger by Mr. Lincoln's cart, and that gentleman was obliged to drive out of the yard and go home to his wife with comparatively little positive information, and in complete ignorance as regarded the wedding-gown.

Salome walked out towards the orchard. Not until she entered it did she see that Miss Nunally was strolling in the shade there. Salome made an involuntary pause in her advance. She had wished to be alone. She had left even her mother. When she had first wakened from the deep sleep of exhaustion which had come to her with its indescribable blessing, Salome thought that she could bear

whatever happened. But as the moments passed and consciousness and memory came clearly back, she wondered if her strength would be equal to all. But it must be equal.

When she came down the stairs her mother met her in the "entry." The face of the elder woman looked much the more worn as the two confronted each other.

Salome leaned forward from the lower stair and put her arms about her mother's neck.

"Mother," she whispered, "if I had not sent that note to Mr. Moore he would not have come, and then he would not have been hurt."

"Salome!" sharply.

The girl raised her head in surprise.

"We needn't trouble ourselves about such things," said Mrs. Gerry. "That is folly. You can't see what will happen because of the simplest action. We are not responsible in that way."

"Well," returned Salome, "we needn't talk about it. There is only one thing sure in this world."

"And what's that?"

"Suffering."

"Oh," cried the mother, "you are too young to know that."

Salome smiled as if she were the elder. But she said nothing more. She walked out-of-doors, and, hearing the proposition of Mr. Lincoln to go to the station, she announced that she would go.

Salome had not gone many yards beneath the trees before Portia saw her. Instead of trying to avoid her Miss Nunnally turned and came forward. As the two met, Portia said with some bitterness:

"You have slept?"

"There comes a time when one must sleep or go mad," was the answer, "and since I have slept I shall not go mad."

"But I—I have lost that trick of sleeping at will. Have you stolen it from me, Salome Gerry?"

Portia now spoke in a particularly soft tone.

Without replying, Salome gazed at her for a long moment; then she said:

"It is impossible that he should not love you—in time, if he does not love you now. Well," with a deep breath, "I hope I want him to be happy."

Some kind of a spasm crossed Portia's face. She seized her companion's hand, holding it tightly, and gazing in her turn at the face before her. Then she laughed in that superficial, mocking way which was sometimes so exasperating.

"What a situation!" she cried. "Here we are, two women in love with that man there who may never live to love either of us. That thought makes you shudder. Perhaps we ought to wish him dead. That would solve it all. Then you and I could mourn him in peace. Don't think I'm unfeeling—I wish I were. Then I should say that you were welcome to his love. But I can't say it. I crave his love."

She paused, walked away, and then returned.

"Oh, I tell you this is intolerable!" she cried. "He had come to see you, had he not?"

"Yes."

"You had sent for him? You had changed your mind? I told you down there in Florida that you were criminally wicked if you told him anything. Now what have you done? Kept silent, tormented him, then suddenly veered about and done this. In a few weeks more we should have been married. I hope your conscience is calm just now, Miss Gerry. Don't speak until I am through—I have a lot to say, but I may not say it all now. You must have a very convenient conscience, or else not any. Turn your head this way, Salome Gerry!" imperiously putting a finger tip under Salome's chin. "There; now tell me, did he still seem to love you? If you speak a falsehood it will have no effect. Tell me!"

"Why should I speak a falsehood now?" was the response. "Yes, he still seemed to love me."

"Oh!"

Portia's hands dropped to her side. Her vivid face for an instant was thunderous. Then she laughed.

"I was sure of it. But, for all that, what he felt for me would pass very well for love. As long as I felt inclined I should have made him happy enough. But you stepped in and sent him a note. Then, of course, he wanted you. We always want the unattainable."

Salome, listening with a poignant sense of the unendurable upon her, heard plainly but one sentence—"As long as I felt inclined I should have made him happy enough."

Replying to that, she exclaimed:

"Then you don't really love him!"

"Not really love him! How ignorant you are! If your tooth aches to-day so that you want to kill yourself, and to-morrow is painless, do you say, therefore, that you did not really have the toothache?"

Salome started up from her leaning position against the tree.

"This is really horrible!" she said, with eager protest. "How can you talk that way? To love, and yet be able to think there will come a time when you do not love! Oh, what is the use of living?"

Salome was startled out of her preoccupation.

"As to that, there's ever so much use in living," returned Miss Nunally. "Sometimes you know a moment of intense, unadulterated happiness. If you live quite a good many years you may know several such moments. The rest of the time, you know, you exist. I'm not sure if we are, on the whole, quite equal to the animals. You are not listening to a word I say, Salome. Well, it makes but little difference. I am talking because when I talk I cannot quite so strongly realize how I suffer. The worst of it is that if you can be very happy, that very capacity makes it positive that you will be very miserable; and in this world there is so much more variety of arrangements for producing misery than for producing happiness. Salome," with a quick,

harsh tone in her voice, "if Mr. Moore gets well, what shall you do?"

The girl thus addressed did not immediately reply. She was looking fixedly at her companion, but plainly was not seeing her.

"Answer me," said Portia; "what shall you do?"

Salome shrank somewhat as she said:

"I am afraid I was not listening. I was thinking."

"Thinking—of what?"

"Of those lines—are they Mrs. Browning's?"

"Those never loved who say 'loved once.'"

Miss Nunally smiled, but her forehead contracted at the same time.

"Very likely they are Mrs. Browning's. And there's not a word of truth in them. Poets like to say such things; and people like to pretend to believe them."

"I believe them," said Salome, firmly.

"Do you? Then you are very ignorant. But you have not yet told me what you will do if Mr. Moore gets well. That Boston man informed me that he had a chance of recovery. What shall you do?"

Salome passed her hands over her face before she replied. She was now so pale that Portia had an impulse to put her arm about her; but she resisted that impulse.

"Do?" said Salome. "Nothing."

Miss Nunally scrutinized her companion in silence a moment; then she said, with the harsh note very prominent now in her voice:

"You are quite different from me, then."

"Am I?" dully.

"Yes. In your place I should break up the engagement and have my lover back again."

"Should you?"

"Certainly. Miss Gerry, don't you know that by good rights you and I ought to hate each other? I ought to poison you, or you ought to poison me."

Salome made an effort to say, "But we shall not poison each other, I suppose?"

She looked around her as one might look for some way to escape.

"Oh no; we shall not poison each other," returned Portia, who had now lost her deliberate, careful utterance. "And I don't hate you. I haven't an idea why I don't hate you."

Salome looked as if she could not speak again. She stood a moment with her hands clasped tightly and hanging in front of her. Her face, in its delicacy, its intensity, had something smitingly piteous in it.

"I cannot stay with you any longer," she said, "I am confused."

She hurried farther down the slope of the orchard, while Portia went slowly back to the house, going, after a hesitating pause in the kitchen, to the open bedroom door and looking in.

Dr. Sands was sitting by the bed. He glanced up at the girl standing there. But Portia did not look at him; she looked at the man lying on the bed. There was a change in Moore's face, and he seemed to be sleeping profoundly.

When Portia moved away she went directly up the stairs to the room where Salome had been resting. She carefully shut the door and sat on the bed. It is at such moments, if ever, that people are frank with themselves. Though perhaps we are never quite frank, even in our most secret thoughts, of ourselves.

"He is going to live. Yes, he is going to live," she was thinking now, and for the first few moments she was conscious only of an intoxicating thankfulness. Portia never held herself aloof from the power of any agreeable emotion; and now she abandoned herself to this penetrating gratitude. She did not ask if she had reason for thinking that Moore would live. She was governed much by impressions and intuitions. Like many finely strung natures, she found that those intuitions rarely failed her.

Out in the orchard Salome had no intuitions and no impressions. She was just now in an exalted state of self-sacrifice and unimpeachable rectitude. Just now she was her mother's daughter, and could walk in the narrow path of right. If Moore lived, of course she had only to avoid him and continue in her colorless life, "which was not life at all." But it was all there was of life left to her. Then she went over again all her reasonings and conclusions of the year that was just past.

She returned to the house, meeting Mrs. Scudder in the yard.

"I was jest lookin' for you, Salome," she said. "It's gittin' along in the afternoon, 'n' it looks to me 's if you ought to be startin' over to Mr. Norton's if you're really goin' for them nusses."

"Mother," called Nely from the other side of the screen door, "don't you go hurrying Salome. It ain't time yet. You ain't got over being flustered yet. Come in."

Mrs. Scudder smiled proudly and obeyed her daughter, saying as she turned away that she didn't know but she had been a grain too beforehand; but still if the nusses come, they wouldn't want to be waitin' roun' to no deepo.

"Mother!" said Nely again. Salome felt an invincible repugnance towards going into the house and seeing any one. She wanted to be by herself, so that she might cherish the mood that now ruled her. She had by this time come to suspect that her resolutions were principally moods that passed. Nely met her at the door.

"Give me a jacket and hat," said Salome. "I'm going to Mr. Norton's."

"But there's lots of time," remonstrated the girl.

"I know it, but I must be out-of-doors. I must be out-of-doors!" with an emphasis that startled Nely.

She brought the jacket and hat. Salome held them a moment in her hand. She was looking at Nely; who met her gaze for an instant, and then said:

"He seems to be asleep. He's just the same."

Salome turned away without a word and hastened down the road. She was thankful that it was a lonely country way. It stretched before her white and straight, the horse-brier and the milkweed and clethra growing close down to the wheel-tracks. The spikes of white clethra were now in full bloom, and they seemed to fill the air with their heavy perfume. Salome liked this flower, though most of the people said it "smelled kind of sickish." It was powerful and tropical. The girl gathered a handful of it, pressing the blooms up to her face. As she inhaled the odor and felt the touch of the petals a quick and complete revulsion of feeling came over her, sweeping away her previous moods as a great wave sweeps away the line of foam which a former wave has left on the sand.

Salome suddenly stood still in the solitary road, with the clear New England sunshine pouring upon her.

"This is my real self." She did not speak those words. She only felt them. And with them came that other emotion that belonged to her real self. She loved.

Now she walked on as if flying before something to which she must yield, but from which she yet fled, knowing all the time how useless was flight.

The flowers hung tightly grasped in her hand.

She was going now towards her home, for she must pass that on her way to Mr. Norton's for the horse and carriage.

As she came opposite the cottage at the Ledge some one came out of the yard quickly, not at first seeing her.

It was Walter Redd; and he had evidently been to the different doors seeking an entrance.

As the two met, the young man held out his hand, saying that he had just given up trying to find some one. He was going by, and had called. He had hitched his horse the other side of that pine, by the road. Was she coming home?

No; she was going to Mr. Norton's to borrow his horse.

"I'm in luck this time, then," said Redd, speaking a trifle more animatedly than usual. "I've got my carry-all out here. If you want the use of a horse and carriage, let me

take you wherever you like. I'd say go without me, but my horse is too lively."

"You are very kind, Walter," began Salome. She did not know why she hesitated.

"Reward me for my kindness, then," said Redd. The girl was vaguely aware that this was a strange way for Redd to talk. Such phrases were so foreign to him.

"I was going to the station," she said; "perhaps it will not be convenient for you to go there."

"Yes, it will," eagerly.

He looked at his watch. "What train do you want to meet? The 6.30, I suppose. We have plenty of time. The drive will do you good. Salome, you look completely tired out. You look as if you had been through something dreadful."

They had been walking towards the carriage as she spoke. Since she had not immediately refused his offer, she found it impossible to refuse it now. And, indeed, there was no reason why she should not accept it.

He helped her into the carriage, and then sat down beside her.

"I've been taking my mother and sister over to the Far Corners," he said, as he took up the reins. "We made a very early start this morning. I've left them there for a visit, and I expect to back it for the next two weeks. I shall be awfully lonesome. I wish you'd let me take you and your mother out to drive once in a while. It would do you both good."

Redd's manner was not in the least heavy to-day, as it was usually. Salome was too much absorbed to notice this, however.

She thanked him, and said that he was always so kind. Then the horse started forward, and she leaned back, holding for a moment her bunch of clethra up to her face.

After a short silence Redd turned to her and repeated his remark that she looked as if she had been through something dreadful. Had anything happened?

VIII

"HE KNEW YOU?"

SALOME wished that her companion would not question her, but she knew that she must reply. Since he had been to the Far Corners he had not heard what nearly every one in the neighborhood by this time knew about that man whom Dwight Scudder had found. There was even a kind of attempt set on foot by the selectmen to inquire into the affair; but the selectmen, being slow-moving farmers, had all taken to the belief that the young man had had "some kind of a fit." It was a comprehensive and comfortable way to account for the whole thing—"some kind of a fit." It was in this attack that the victim of the seizure had trampled on the bushes, and in the fall he had hit his head.

Three gentlemen had gathered at the scene of the accident, and had come to the conclusion that bushes would be trampled upon in just that kind of a way by a man in a fit.

Nevertheless, to make things seem as they ought to seem in such cases, they had assumed a wise look, and had announced that "investigations was being made." They discussed the advisability of offering a reward, but, under the assumption that a fit was the cause of the misfortune, they hesitated about the reward, and thought that it would be better to wait. The young man might "come to."

"So you haven't heard?" said Salome, after a perceptible hesitation.

Redd turned fully towards her.

"Heard what?" with the same unusual quickness of utterance.

"That Mr. Moore was found insensible by the road-side near Clear Brook last night," she said.

"Moore? That fellow you used to know in Florida?"

"Yes."

Redd was gazing at his horse's head. Salome did not look at him. Her own eyes were fixed unseeingly forward.

"Then he came to see you, I suppose?"

Redd said this in his old heavy manner. Salome resented the remark, but she answered with the same monosyllable she had just used:

"Yes."

Redd sat up more erect. He turned his glance now fully upon his companion. He was thinking that this was the first time he had really allowed himself to look at her since she had come home. He had seen her but a few times. He had been very rigid with himself. There were occasions when he thought that he would give up being so rigid. It really seemed to amount to nothing in the end. Here he was more in love with this girl than he had ever been before.

Instead of following up his last question with one like it, Redd now inquired:

"Is he dead?"

"No; he is insensible."

"Well, is he going to come out of it? That's what I want to know. Is he going to come out of it?"

"I don't know."

Salome was grasping the side of the seat. She was trying to be in some degree self-controlled. She had never known Walter to seem cruel before; but she now felt a decided cruelty in his appearance and in his words.

"Well," said Redd, in his most concentrated manner, "whether he gets well or not, I'm free to say he must be the meanest kind of a skunk I ever heard of."

He pulled the whip violently from its socket and lashed it upon the horse.

"Will you let me get out?" Salome's eyes flashed as she turned them towards her companion.

"No; I'm going to take you to the station; and I'm going to take the nurses to Scudder's. I think you spoke of nurses. I suppose they are for that fellow."

Salome sat back on the seat. She was aware of a sudden access of physical strength great enough, it seemed to her, to throw Redd out of the carriage. Her pulses beat so in her temples that she "saw crimson," though why everything should look red she did not know.

"Now you're as mad as you can be," said Redd, whose loss of self-command appeared to be now as thorough as his habitual possession of it.

After a moment Redd went on: "There isn't a great deal more time between here and the station, and I'm going to make the most of it. You ought to be kind of reasonable, Salome Gerry. You can't expect me to love Moore, can you? You can't expect me to love a man who has behaved as he has to you. You loved him, and he left you. I don't want you to marry him, but, by God! I do want you to be happy. I swear I want you to be happy even if you walk over me to find happiness. But to have a cuss of a fellow like that playing with you! Coming back here now, when you might have settled down somehow without him. And he took me in, too!"

Salome was shrinking away as far as possible from her companion.

"Will you stop?" she asked, breathlessly, in the silence that followed Redd's last remark.

"No; I won't stop. It ain't often I get to talking, but when I do I'm apt to say all I want to say. There's the station now. It ain't time. I'm going a piece down this road."

He turned his horse. Then he glanced at Salome.

"I know it's mean," he said, still unrelentingly, "but I've got to do it. Now I have you where I can talk to you, I've got to keep you. Perhaps I'm making you hate me?"

As there was no response to this question, Redd repeated it. And again there was no response; the man went on with intense bitterness in his tone:

"All right; I've got to bear that, I suppose, as well as everything else. But I don't know how you expect me to feel to a man who has treated you as Moore has. Why, I'd have sold my soul for half the love you gave to him; and see how coolly he leaves you down South there!"

Now Salome spoke. She had begun to feel a kind of pity with her indignation.

"You are so mistaken," she said, "so entirely mistaken. Mr. Moore was not to blame. Can't you believe me, Walter? Can't you believe me?"

"No, I can't!" violently. "Do you expect me to believe such a thing as that? You want to shield him. But I know how you loved him. I ain't likely to forget that!"

Salome sat there in silent endurance. She hoped that this endurance would hold out. She wished that her temples would not beat so. If those hammer-like pulses kept up she did not know what strange thing she might do.

Everything, everything in the world was useless, too. If Moore lived he would marry Miss Nunally—that is, she supposed that he ought to marry her. She was quite sure that her mother would say that he ought to marry her. Some people had a prejudice in favor of keeping their word.

It was really curious how many things one could think of, and what a strange light was on these things if one's temples beat so.

"When I saw you at the house just now," began Redd—"when I saw you coming, I was fool enough to be so glad that I could think of nothing else but just that. I didn't mean to talk like this. I didn't. But a man can't always do just as he wants to, so I've made you hate me worse than ever. I was going to be real gentle to you. You looked as if you'd been suffering, so I thought I couldn't be gentle enough; and this is the way it's turned out."

Redd paused. They had come to another turn in the road. He pulled in his horse, which was now wet with sweat; it stood panting.

Redd looked at his watch.

"I'll get you to the station in time ; you needn't worry about that," he said.

With the lines in one hand he leaned his elbows on his knees and his face on his closed hands.

Presently he said, without lifting his head : " I ain't got a very good temper, I expect. It ain't quick, but when it gets up I'm kind of a devil, I suppose, and this has worn on me so, Salome," now raising his head and looking at her. " This has worn on me so ever since you told me that night before you went to Florida that you didn't love me. I said to you then that I didn't give up. I ain't one of the kind that gives up."

Salome shuddered in silence. Redd carefully took a good hold of the reins. Then he looked at his watch again.

" I might 's well tell you the whole," he said. " It won't make matters any worse."

Yet, having spoken thus, Redd seemed to hesitate. Then he went on :

" I knew Moore was hurt. I struck him. But I didn't suppose he was hurt much. He went down there among the bushes. I drove away. Do you hear me, Salome?"

" I hear you."

" I'll tell you all there is to it. I saw him at a distance when he came into the town yesterday, before he saw you. I met your mother afterwards. I was beside myself. But I don't bluster round much. I knew your mother was afraid about me. It was bad luck that Moore and I should run across each other late in the afternoon yesterday. He wasn't calm, and I wasn't, either. I expect I said some tough things to him. Anyway, he blazed up and struck me first. We had kind of a scuffle there in the bushes. Then I hit him. He dropped. I didn't stay to find out anything. I didn't care. I drove off home. Early this morning, as I told you, I took my folks to the Far Corners; and I'd just got back. I was stopping at your house. Now I'll take

you to the station. There's plenty of time. You can hate me all you want to."

Redd turned his horse, and in a few moments more they were at the station, which was a bit of a building set in the midst of an oak wood.

There was nobody there save the agent, who stared at them with the interest he bestowed on every one.

The instant the horse stopped Salome sprang out. She hurried away from the carriage to the edge of the platform. She stood there looking blindly down the straight track, which dwindled out of sight among the trees.

Her only clear thought at that moment was the hope that Redd would not come near her. If he came near her now while the red was before her eyes and the beating was in her temples she might push him off on to the rails just as the engine came.

She was sorry that the thought had come to her that she might push him off in front of the engine. She knew that she would not do such a thing—that is, she thought that she knew it. But she wished that dreadful beating would stop in her temples.

There was a step behind and close to her. It was Redd. He was aware that he ought not to approach her, and yet he could not keep away.

"It's time for the train," he said, now speaking in his old slow manner.

Salome turned. "Don't come near me!" she whispered. He moved back a few paces. He was thinking that it was a terrible thing to be drawn to any one as he was drawn to that girl.

"There's the train," he said. He had a sudden fear that she might step off upon the track.

But she made no motion to do so. The train came slowing up. Salome stood back a little now and tried to look along the line of cars. She had come for something. Oh, she knew now why she had come. She went forward towards two women, girls they seemed to be, who had

alighted. They were the only people who had left the train. A trunk was swung down from the baggage-car, then the bell sounded and the train was gone.

As Salome advanced to the strangers she was wondering if she would be able to greet them. To her surprise voice and words came directly.

"Did Dr. Jennings send you?" she asked of the girl nearest her. "Yes; then you are the nurses. I have come for you. Here is the carriage. You will have to get the agent to bring the trunk to-night."

Having said so much with the utmost glibness and appropriateness, Salome was sure that she could not speak again.

Redd stood at the carriage. He assisted the two strangers. Then he turned towards Salome. It seemed to her a childish thing to refuse his aid; and yet she had never done a more difficult thing than to force herself to touch his hand.

His somewhat saturnine face lighted in a pathetic manner.

"Oh, thank you!" he whispered, as he took his seat beside her. "You would forgive me if you knew how I suffer."

She turned towards him coldly.

"You need not thank me," she said. "I shall never forgive you."

"Very well," he answered. "You will do as you please, now, as you have always done. But—"

Redd looked full at the girl. She was not afraid of him. She was thinking of paragraphs in the newspapers that told of men who had killed women who had rejected them. Perhaps Redd would kill her. That would not be so bad. That was cutting a knot which could not be untied. Only her mother would be sorry.

In a few moments Salome turned in the seat and addressed some remark to the strangers. She made a brave attempt to hear what was said in reply, but she could not make any sense; their words rattled about in her ears like stones.

At the Scudder house the mistress of the family was recovering from her fluster.

As she often asserted, she was generally as "calm as a clock," but "there was certain things that did upset her awful, and no mistake."

Mrs. Hill had come over to make inquiries, and to be there if possible when the "nusses" arrived. She felt that this was an occasion that must not be neglected; and she had left her "table a-standin'" and had walked three miles, though she was obliged to use a cane on account of a long-continued "sciatiky" in her left leg. She had not made, under these circumstances, much more than a mile an hour. She had confidently reckoned upon having a lift from the butcher whose day it was to come over this road. He had, indeed, driven along, and she had turned about, leaning on her cane, and signalling imperatively to him to stop. But he had been apparently deeply engaged in assorting something in the back of his wagon, and had been blind and deaf. She could not know that he was saying to himself that "he'd be darned if he'd take in that thunderin' old Hill woman."

Mrs. Hill, whom Nely Scudder did not love, was now sitting in the kitchen. She had hobbled twice to the door of the bedroom and looked at Moore as he lay there. She had expressed it as her decided opinion that he would never come to. She had seen several persons layin' like that, and not one of them had ever come to.

"And where was that gal that was engaged to him? She'd heard that there was a gal that had come. She had seen Matthew Lincoln 'n' he had told her 'bout that gal. She, Mrs. Hill, wanted to see her. She could tell in a minute what kind of a gal she was."

As Miss Nunally could not be produced at this moment, Mrs. Hill was obliged to wait before she saw that "gal." She employed the time by asking how it was that S'lome Gerry was mixed up with this affair.

At this point in the conversation Nely, who was sweeping the kitchen, said:

"Mother!" in such a warning tone that Mrs. Scudder, who had intended to reply very differently, said in the most general way that she found there was a good many things in this world that she couldn't understand.

"Oh, land!" exclaimed Mrs. Hill, contemptuously. She felt that she had not come three miles with her sciatiky leg to be told any such stuff as that.

She now remarked that she had thought for a good while that S'lome Gerry wasn't exactly as she should be. 'N' she'd ben well brought up, too. There wa'n't nothin' against the Gerryses nor the Wareses. Had Mis' Scudder heard 'bout one of them High School gals 'n' S'lome?

No, Mrs. Scudder had not heard. Here Nely made a great racket with her broom among the chairs.

"'Twas Christiana Moody. She'd done something or other that was against the rules. Anyway, 'twas thought she had. 'N' S'lome, she knew it; 'n' when the master arst her 'bout it, instid of sayin' Christiana done it, S'lome up 'n' says she didn't. 'N' so the gal didn't git punished, on account of S'lome's tellin' a lie. You see Chris told of it. She said she should never forgit it of S'lome in the world, she was so grateful. But I call it underminin' the foundations of the world. 'N' I hope S'lome's mother won't never hear of it. The Wareses was always truthful 's daylight."

Nely's broom hit the chairs still more noisily.

Mrs. Hill went on:

"I met Matthew Lincoln, 's I told ye. He said S'lome was mixed up somehow, 'n' he couldn't find out how. I told him I guessed mebby I could find out. Anyway, I'd try. There's Nely now; I'll bet she knows, don't ye, Nely? You've been kind of thick with S'lome. Is this feller a beau of S'lome's? I've always said that something or other happened to her down South. Nely, you know, don't ye?"

Nely rested on her broom and looked at her questioner. Mrs. Scudder anxiously watched her daughter.

"Now don't you go to lyin', Nely," said Mrs. Hill, with a significant emphasis on the pronoun.

The girl tossed her head. She said that she had been brought up not to lie, and she wasn't going to begin now. Then she went on sweeping, flourishing her broom and raising so much dust that Mrs. Hill began to cough convulsively.

"Nely!" said Mrs. Scudder.

"You told me to sweep," said Nely, "and I've got to sweep. If folks get choked with the dust I don't know 's I'm to blame."

Mrs. Scudder shook her head entreatingly. Mrs. Hill, emerging from her handkerchief, stopped coughing long enough to say that she had borne some things, and she s'posed she could bear others. And what kind of an operation had they performed on that young man? Matthew Lincoln said that they had cut his head open and taken out some of his brains. For her part—

It was at this stage in the lady's remarks that Miss Nunally came down-stairs and entered the room.

Nely stopped sweeping immediately. Although she had begun upon a consistent course of hatred towards Miss Nunally, she was very glad to see her now.

Mrs. Scudder performed a painstaking introduction between the woman who had, impelled by curiosity, walked three miles on a sciatiky leg and the imperious-looking girl who had just stepped within the kitchen.

Portia walked forward and sat down near Mrs. Hill. There was a good deal of combativeness in Portia. She now scented a battle. She leaned back in her chair and looked at Mrs. Hill; and as she looked she hated, as Nely hated, this sleek human being. Mrs. Hill was not so dull but that she also scented battle. But she was very curious. Her eyes travelled eagerly over every detail of Portia's dress; they dwelt upon the rings on her hands; then her glance came up to Portia's face and encountered the girl's eyes. These eyes sometimes had something like a

paralyzing effect, they could be so cold and so contemptuous.

To the surprise of the other three women it was Portia who began to question.

"Did you walk?" she asked. Mrs. Hill was so surprised that she blushed. Her face always looked as if it had just been vigorously washed in soapsuds. Indeed, it was Nely's often-asserted belief that Mrs. Hill used all the softsoap she annually made upon her own countenance.

At first she did not seem inclined to reply. Therefore Portia repeated her question, her enunciation even more careful than usual, and she prided herself upon never, under any circumstances, chewing her words.

"Ee-us; I walked," now replied Mrs. Hill.

"And you are lame?" glancing at the cane which its owner usually had very much in evidence.

"Ee-us; I'm lame. Got sciatiky. The doctors can't do—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I wasn't asking you about the doctors," said Miss Nunally, in such a way that for the first time since she had seen her Nely questioned as to whether she should continue to hate her or not.

Mrs. Hill visibly writhed in her chair. "How far away do you live?" asked Miss Nunally.

"Three mild."

Portia lifted her upper lip in her most infuriating way.

"Three miles!" she said. "How curious you must have been, Mrs. Hill! Have you found out anything that pays you for coming all that way on that leg that the doctors can't do anything for?"

A silence, during which Portia, leaning comfortably back in her chair, gazed at the woman before her.

"Have you?" she repeated.

"I—I'm sure I d' know," was the answer, pronounced with some difficulty.

"Ask me," said Portia, smiling. "I'm an excellent person to ask. I'm engaged to that young man who is ill.

We were to have been married next Tuesday at half-past seven. I shall marry him as soon as he is well enough. There was a gentleman here a while ago—Mr. Lincoln. He came to inquire about the wedding-gown. I didn't tell him. I'm not going to tell you. Does your sciatica ever keep you from asking questions?"

Another silence. When Portia had waited again, she asked :

"Does it?"

In the silence that also followed this repetition there was distinctly heard an ill-suppressed giggle from Nely. Nely's mother was so absorbed in the scene that she forgot to make any sign of disapproval.

"Mr. Lincoln," now went on Portia, "was so good as to mention one or two cases where girls had been laid out in their wedding-gowns. I gathered that he rather wished that I might be laid out in mine. But I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Hill, that under no imaginable circumstances shall I be laid out in my wedding-gown. Is there anything more you'd like to know? Nely," turning to that person, "is there anything more you think that Mrs. Hill would like to know?"

As Nely was utterly incapable of speaking at this moment, Portia turned leisurely back to the guest.

"I guess I better be goin'," said Mrs. Hill, in a muffled voice. She found strength to add : "I left my table a-standin'."

Portia sprang up.

"Let me help you," she said, solicitously.

Mrs. Hill grasped a chairback and her cane.

"Don't you tech me!" she said.

Portia laughed. She said she was sorry that the sciatica was so serious. She should think that walks would be bad for it. Was she really going? Good-morning. She was so glad it had happened so that they two could meet. Could not Mrs. Hill come again while she, Miss Nunally, was at Mr. Scudder's?

Mrs. Hill hobbled painfully, yet hurriedly, to the door. She went out without turning towards her hostess.

Portia gently closed the screen door behind the retreating guest.

"Really," she said, "I hope there are more of them. Already there are two, a man and a woman. They keep me from yielding; they are excellent tonics. But to see them often—Mrs. Scudder, how do you bear it?"

Mrs. Scudder felt it incumbent upon her to rouse and declare, as she had more than once said to Nely, that Mrs. Hill was a real good woman.

She was frightened at what Miss Nunally had done.

"Oh, a good woman, is she?" said Portia.

"Yes, she is. She is constant to meet'n', 'n'—"

"Mother," said Nely, with the relentless candor of youth, "she ain't a good woman, neither; not if she went to meet'n' every hour of her life. She's a prying, gossiping old wretch—that's what she is."

"How her 'sciatiky' leg will ache before she gets home!" remarked Portia.

Having said this, Miss Nunally sat down wearily. A look of deadly fatigue dropped like a veil over her face. Her eyes grew dull and almost colorless.

She sat thus for a few moments, and Nely furtively watched her. She was thinking that that girl was in love, too, and she was going to marry that man if he got well. Then what would become of Salome?

Mrs. Gerry had gone to a neighbor's to procure something for the household. At this distance from stores people were often obliged to borrow of one another.

Dr. Sands had gone away for an hour or two, leaving the instruction that there was nothing to do; that he would be back before there was any chance of anything to do.

Mr. Scudder had long since returned from driving Dr. Jennings to the station, and he was now down in the meadow trying to get the hay into cocks before it was absolutely night.

Portia walked into the bedroom and sat down by the bed.

Mrs. Scudder was in and out, keeping faithful watch. She was still tempted to try mustard paste on the back of Moore's neck. It seemed to her that mustard paste faithfully used would bring "most anything to."

She went to the door, but turned away as she saw Miss Nunally sitting there.

Portia was not one of those who seem appropriately placed in a sick-room. Still, if she undertook to do anything there she did it deftly, because she did everything deftly. But she had no vocation, as she would have said, towards nursing. In fact, as she was accustomed to declare, she had no vocation towards anything save the spending of money. Her aunt had heretofore provided her with this vocation; but even Mrs. Darrah was wearying of this. She said her niece was really too independent for a dependent person. Whereupon Portia had responded that she was never going to cultivate humility, not if she starved, and when the girl broke the engagement with the rich and infatuated Englishman, Mrs. Darrah had said that, for her part, she was going to live a short time without her niece, that her niece might try her life with her parents for a while.

So it happened that Portia had for some months been living with her father and mother at the small sea-coast city on the North Shore of Massachusetts. Life there had been exceedingly limited, and she had not contributed at all to the happiness of her parents. In fact, as she would have frankly acknowledged, she had "led them 'a life." She was too fastidious to be poor; and she secretly despised her father and mother because poverty did not make them unhappy. Not that they were very poor; they were, as Portia said, "comfortably off." She asserted that it was a dreadful thing to be comfortably off, for then there seemed to be no incentive towards anything more.

"My father is sure of his bread and his cigars," she used to say, scornfully, "and my mother is sure that my father is sure of them; so they keep on living like that."

Nely went to the bedroom door and glanced in. She knew that Miss Nunally was there, and she wanted to look at her. She felt that she was growing bewitched to watch Miss Nunally.

Portia sat far back in the large chair with her eyes fixed upon Moore. She did not know that Nely was looking at her in hostile admiration. She was thinking, with inexpressible bitterness, that her life thus far had been a very poor thing indeed. What if she had known some moments of wild happiness such as natures like hers can experience? Those moments were gone. Just now the girl felt as if everything was in the past for her. There was nothing in the future. Moore did not love her as other men had loved her. Nevertheless—

The girl sighed heavily. Her gaze, which had for a time been fixed blankly upon the white coverlid of the bed, now rose to Moore's face. She leaned forward breathlessly and silently, for Moore was looking at her.

At the very first she could not tell whether he knew her or not. Almost immediately he closed his eyes again. Portia sat motionless. Already it had seemed to her that Moore had been unconscious a long time, that it was days since he had been hurt.

She felt a sort of exultation that it was she who was sitting beside him, that it was not Salome upon whom his gaze first rested.

It was difficult for her to be quiet; but she knew that she must be quiet. When would he look at her again?

The operation must have been successful. But she was not quite sure whether he had known her or not.

What if he should recover, but should not be himself? Confused stories of such cases came to her mind. But she only dimly understood concerning the operation that had been performed. She did not care to understand such things. They were too horrifying.

She remained leaning forward over the bed. Presently

she reached out her hand and laid it over his, which rested so inertly upon the cover.

Immediately he opened his eyes again and she caught his glance in hers.

But he seemed unable to make the exertion required to keep his eyelids raised.

"Randolph," she said, softly. The eyelids quivered in response to the word, but they did not lift.

Portia rose to her feet in uncontrollable excitement.

Perhaps something ought to be done—and what? She was so helpless.

She turned towards the door, and at the same moment she heard some one enter the kitchen. The footsteps came directly towards her and Dr. Sands appeared. She did not speak. She watched the man as he came to the foot of the bed and gazed at his patient.

The doctor put his lips together as if he would whistle, and held them there without whistling.

Moore was lying as he had been lying, and his eyes were now closed. But there was an indefinable change in his appearance.

Portia rose and walked swiftly to the doctor. She clasped both hands about his arm with a closeness of which she was not aware.

"If you know, tell me!—tell me!" she whispered.

Dr. Sands looked at her admiringly. It was a curious fact that there was rarely a man who could look at Miss Nunally with absolute indifference.

"Oh," he said, in that brusque way which is sometimes so much more reassuring than smooth speech would be, "I guess we are going to pull through this time. Neat little job. Jennings is the man for such things. Remarkably neat job. Has he opened his eyes?"

As Dr. Sands asked this question he went to the bedside and lifted Moore's wrist, putting his finger on the pulse.

Portia said "Yes," watching every movement.

"And he saw you? He knew you, I suppose?"

Dr. Sands glanced with the keenest interest at the girl as he made this inquiry.

She hesitated.

"What!" he said, sharply, "can't you tell whether he knew you or not?"

"No, I can't tell."

"But he saw you?"

"Yes."

Dr. Sands now appeared to forget Miss Nunally entirely in his interest in the "case."

He sat down by the bed and leaned his head on his hand with his eyes fixed intently upon Moore.

Portia walked away. She could not stay in the house. She hurried into the road, walking back and forth, unable to think clearly, oppressed beyond measure. To be unhappy made Portia angry. If Moore were not going to know her, what then?

IX

THE TIME OF THE CLETHRA

WHEN Walter Redd's horse had brought himself and his three companions within sight of Mr. Scudder's house Salome asked the young man if he would allow her to alight. Without a word, he stopped the horse. She left the carriage before he could make any attempt to assist her. Not looking at the people she was leaving, she walked quickly into a cart-path that branched from the highway here.

The dusk of the evening was now coming on rapidly.

The elder of the two nurses watched Salome. Then she turned towards Redd.

"Why do you let her go?" she asked, with some asperity. "Do you not see that she ought not to go alone? She is suffering."

"I can't help it. I can't help what she does," he answered, gruffly. "But that path leads out towards her home. Perhaps she is going home."

When Redd had seen the two nurses enter the house, he remained standing a few moments by his horse. He was looking at the house, where the lamps were already lighted. He knew that he could not go away until he had learned how Moore was. Whatever the answer to his question, he must hear it. He had not the least care as to whether Salome let it be known that it was his blow which had injured Moore. She probably would not tell. It was of no consequence—not the least. But he must know how Moore was. Whether Moore lived or died, he had the best of everything, since Salome loved him.

Standing there in the twilight, Redd envied the man in that little room. Things were all plain to Moore, since Salome loved him.

After a short time a woman appeared on the porch. It was Mrs. Gerry, and she was evidently seeking Redd. She came quickly to his side.

"I'm looking for Salome," she said. "I thought she was with you."

Redd told his companion where he had last seen the girl. He added that "he took a notion that she was going home."

"I wish you would take me home, Walter," said Mrs. Gerry. "I can go now. They don't need me here any more since the nurses have come, and I don't know how long I could bear it, either. It's trying on the nerves."

Mrs. Gerry stood so quietly and spoke so calmly that her last words sounded incongruous.

"I'll take you," said the young man, shortly. "Get right in."

Mrs. Gerry went back for her belongings. But when she returned, Redd said that he must find out exactly how Moore was before he left that yard. He spoke with deep emphasis, and with a sort of still excitement upon him; but Mrs. Gerry was not surprised at that; indeed, she thought it natural that he should feel so. When she began to speak Redd interrupted her almost savagely.

"Don't deceive me! Tell me just how things are."

"Why should I deceive you?" in surprise. "I don't think it can be told positively yet. I can tell you my belief." As she paused Redd took her arm with unconscious violence.

"Don't act as if I were a child who could not be told anything!" he exclaimed. "What do you think about him?"

"I believe he will get well." Redd released Mrs. Gerry's arm.

"Oh, you do? What'll he do if he gets well?"

Mrs. Gerry at this showed some displeasure. She did not answer. She said that she would like to go; if Salome did not come home she must find her. The child had had so much to bear.

Redd helped her into the carriage. He placed the reins in her hand, saying:

"Wait a minute."

Then he walked in at the back door and through the kitchen to the bedroom. He did not notice Miss Nunally, who was sitting in the kitchen. He was intent upon seeing Moore and judging for himself. He didn't care much about what people said to him. So he walked just within the door and gazed at the occupant of the bed. Dr. Sands was there, and the nurses, but Redd asked no questions. Presently he went out as silently as he had entered. This time his glance took in Miss Nunally.

He took his place by Mrs. Gerry, and drove out of the yard.

"Who is that woman?" he asked. "That fair woman?"

"It is the one to whom Moore is engaged," was the answer.

"I s'pose she loves him, too?"

"Yes."

Redd turned to look at Mrs. Gerry.

"Oh, curse the fellow!" he said, in a low tone. "Why should he have everything?"

"Walter.!" entreatingly.

"Yes, I know you're sorry for me. Well, I can bear it from you. I don't often let go of myself, as you know, Mrs. Gerry. I guess I'll get a good grip again by-and-by. But things have been rather tough with me lately. If Salome didn't have to suffer I rather think I could bear things. I'll stop whimpering now."

Redd sat up rigidly and urged his horse. It took only a short time to reach the house of the Gerrys. When the carriage stopped a figure detached itself from the deeper shadow of the house and came forward.

"Is that you, mother?" It was Salome's voice, and the hearing of it went far towards taking away her mother's composure. Mrs. Gerry did not answer, because she could not. She hurried forward, and Redd drove away immediately.

"I came home," said the girl. "I knew you would be coming soon, and I wanted to be with you, mother."

She took her mother's hand and drew the arm over her shoulders. "You know how we said once in Florida that it was you and I, mother. That's the way it is to be, isn't it?"

Worn out, Mrs. Gerry sobbed heavily. She was afraid of the hysterical inclination which came so strongly upon her.

"Come," said Salome, calmly, "let us go in. I found the key where you always leave it. I said that I would wait here until half-past eight, then I would go back to Mrs. Scudder's for you. They don't need you now. And I do need you. I shall always need you—as long as I live. Do you think I show any consumptive tendencies now?"

The two women had entered the house. Mrs. Gerry sat down directly, stumbling against a chair in the darkness.

Salome found the matches and lighted a lamp, setting it carefully on the shelf. Having done this she turned to her mother and repeated her question about consumptive tendencies. But Mrs. Gerry could not answer. She bent forward and covered her face with her hands, sobbing again still more heavily. Salome's calmness entirely unnerved her mother.

The girl knelt down by her mother's chair.

"Oh, don't! Please don't!" she whispered. "How tired you must be! You must go to bed. Let me take care of you. You haven't slept for so long. Poor mother!"

Salome's voice murmured on as she helped her mother to undress. She sat down by the bed and leaned over it, stroking the worn face. Mrs. Gerry was now weeping quietly, gazing at her daughter through her tears.

"You needn't worry one bit about me," Salome was

saying. "I shall go back to school to-morrow. You know it would be vacation now, only that there were those weeks to make up. Next month there will be no school. I'm sorry for that. But I can be busy about something. Do you think you will sleep? I'm sure you will. Good-night."

Salome pressed her cheek to her mother's face for an instant. Then she softly left the room and Mrs. Gerry fell asleep.

It seemed strange to both women, though neither spoke on the subject, that the next days should go on so quietly.

Salome rose the following morning as if nothing had happened. She ate her breakfast and washed the dishes before she prepared for school.

Mrs. Gerry looked at her at first furtively, then openly.

As the girl took up her hat Mrs. Gerry spoke :

"I want to say something to you before you go."

"Well, mother?" meeting steadfastly the elder eyes.

Then Mrs. Gerry asked, as Portia had asked :

"If he gets well what are you going to do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. Tell me truly."

"Nothing. Why do you all ask me that?"

"Because—because— Oh! Salome, it is dreadful, but I don't quite know what to expect of you. There is only one thing left for you; you must be sure of that. Mr. Moore can be nothing to you. Remember that. He is going to marry Miss Nunally. You must look forward to a life without him. He is not free. He ought not to have come here."

Mrs. Gerry spoke bitterly. She felt that it was so like a man, even a man like Moore, to have come in spite of everything. If he had only stayed away!

Salome said nothing. She stood with her hat in her hand looking at her mother.

"Do you hear me?"

There was the irritability of fatigue and anxiety in the woman's voice, and she repeated her question in a higher key. She added immediately the further inquiry :

"Are you going to be honorable?"

Salome moved her hat about in her hands. There came a peculiar glow to her eyes.

"I mean to do exactly as my mother's daughter ought to do."

She spoke with ardent resolution. She continued, hurriedly:

"Oh, you must trust me, mother. Now I have come home to the North I am going to be good. I am going to be conscientious. If you could only see into my heart you would take courage about me. You would, truly!"

The girl's aspect was alight. Mrs. Gerry's soul suddenly threw off a load of apprehension.

"That is right," she said, thankfully. "Now run along to school. But, dear, let us only bear our burdens from day to day. Don't let us look forward."

Salome walked a few steps towards the door. But she returned, the high look of courage and resolve intensified upon her face.

"It is you and I, really, isn't it, mother?" she asked. "And now I am going."

Before she was out of sight Salome heard her mother's voice calling to her.

"I will go over by-and-by and ask how Mr. Moore is," she said.

So several days passed. Salome went to school. Her mother was busy with housework; still she did not fail to go every afternoon to Mr. Scudder's and make inquiries about the patient. But Salome did not go. Why should she? What was Mr. Moore to her? Her mother, of course, could go; it was right and proper that she should.

Miss Nunally remained at the farm-house, and Nely Scudder, who was kept at home to help cook for "them nusses" and for Miss Nunally, found in some curious way that her resolve to hate this young lady was weakening.

That Miss Nunally was Moore's betrothed seemed sufficient reason for hatred on Nely's part.

Dr. Jennings, from Boston, came and went several times. Dr. Sands was there continually, it seemed to the female Scudders. Indeed, the country doctor felt that he must lose no opportunity to study the progress of this case.

After a week one of the nurses left. Dr. Sands took her away one morning. He announced gayly that it was ridiculous to have two women there to take care of that young fellow when one was enough. The young fellow was going on splendidly—splendidly.

Dr. Jennings did not speak so confidently, but he did say that all things pointed towards recovery. He said also that he did not think it would be necessary for him to come again. When he left the house he saw Portia walking down the lane. He looked at her a moment, and then, with a decided step, he followed her. She glanced radiantly at him.

“He is going to get well!” she exclaimed.

The man did not answer. He moved on beside Portia, his hands behind him, his head bent. The girl felt as if she were treading upon air, so buoyant was she. Already she saw herself and Moore away from this place. Once away she believed that time and her own presence would insure his love to her.

Dr. Jennings lifted his grave face and turned it towards her.

“A man in my place sees a great many things,” he said. “I have no business to advise, I know, but I tell you to marry that young man. Marry directly. Take him away. Don’t be so foolish as to have any silly, womanish scruples. Propose this thing to him. If he had not been hurt you would have been his wife before this. Pardon me, Miss Nunally. It will be better for him not to marry that other girl.” The doctor from Boston lifted his hat slowly, then he went back to the yard where the carriage was waiting for him. He sat down and did not open his lips in response to any remarks made by Mr. Scudder, who was driving him. That gentleman, after two or three attempts at

conversation, gave up speaking, deciding within himself that this "doctor feller was thinking about cutting up somebody."

What the doctor fellow was really thinking was this :

"I am a jackass for meddling ; but somehow I couldn't help it. Of course that young man is bound to shipwreck himself somehow. But that other girl—"

At this point the thoughts of Dr. Jennings were not as clearly defined as it was his habit to have his thoughts. Being a man, as well as a skilful surgeon, his mind had dwelt now and then upon those two women. He had seen Salome but once, on his first visit. Perhaps he had judged her then as nearly without reference to her sex as it is possible for a man to judge a young woman. And he had judged her with extreme harshness, as the best of us is liable to judge of one with whom one is entirely out of sympathy.

Of course it was not possible that Dr. Jennings should know Salome in the brief time in which he had seen her. But he was a man of instant and strong prejudices, and of insight as well. And he was thinking of his patient ; all things in his mind were subservient to the welfare of his patient, or to what he considered his welfare.

So, as these two men drove along the still country road, the surgeon for the first half of the way was thinking rather intently of the complications which he thought surrounded this patient of his.

"It would be quite enough for a well man to contend with," he was saying to himself, "but for a man who has had that kind of a blow on his head—and who gave him the blow?"

At this point in his meditations Dr. Jennings raised his head, mentally shook himself, took out his note-book, and began studying it. For several days thereafter, however, there were moments when his mind reverted to that case out in the country. It was altogether more interesting than usual ; there seemed to be a good many things that might happen in connection with it. He must have Sands write to him about it.

Portia, left alone after this advice had been given her, continued to walk on up the green lane. The blackbirds were flying about as they were always flying over the meadow through which the lane led on its way to the pasture.

Portia fell to thinking of all her love-affairs. She did not count those entanglements wherein her heart had not been enlisted. There had been two or three times in her life when she believed sincerely that she loved. Something had happened so that she did not marry, and she had come later to be very grateful that something had happened each time.

She was truly in love now, she told herself. There was no mistake as to her feeling for Moore. But she could not help wishing that there had not been those other times when she had also felt that there was no mistake. Such thoughts are often the penalty of being in any measure susceptible. And Portia had been susceptible all her life, and had flung herself headlong into some emotions.

Nevertheless, this was real. Nothing in the world should make her give up this. Oh, certainly, there was no doubt about this. Still, if Charmian had been present, it might, perhaps, have been a satisfaction to ask, "Did I ever love Cæsar so?"

After a time she went slowly back to the house. Nely was in the vegetable garden, which extended back of the porch. She was picking "shell-beans" for the next day. Just within the porch Mrs. Scudder was arranging to make Dutch cheese. Matters had adjusted themselves so that the work of the household was now carried on smoothly, only there was, as Nely often fretfully remarked, "an awful lot to do."

Mrs. Scudder had not been flustered of late. She cherished an ineradicable conviction that, if she had only continued mustard plasters long enough upon the back of Moore's head, he would have done even better than he was doing now. She told every one of this conviction, and that

the only thing in the way of her being allowed to follow out this treatment was the strong wish entertained by doctors to cut people up. She was convinced that they wished to cut people just for the pleasure of sewing them up again. She did not understand it, but it was so.

She was making these remarks for the hundredth time to one of the neighbors now as Miss Nunally entered.

The girl did not linger; she went directly on into what was usually the sitting-room, but which had of late been given up for Moore's use.

The young man was lying on a lounge. He seemed to be listening to the nurse, who was sitting near reading items from a newspaper. He looked up languidly as Portia entered. She paused by the nurse and extended her hand to take the paper.

"I will read now," she said.

The nurse hesitated an instant. But very few people succeeded in opposing Portia, and the nurse was not one of them. She rose and left the room, casting a glance of some anxiety back at her charge.

Moore was looking at Portia, looking intently, but as if with a veil over his eyes.

It was curious that he should say just now that he had been thinking for two days of asking Portia if she were tired of her engagement to him.

The paper dropped from the girl's hand. She flushed a little as she leaned somewhat forward and answered:

"Tired? How can you ask me that when I love you?"

The voice in which she spoke was very sweet and very genuine.

Moore put his hand over his eyes, and with it still there, he asked:

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite. You do not doubt it?"

"No; no, Portia," removing his hand and speaking with a trifle more of animation. "Let us be married directly—to-morrow—to-day. Don't oppose me. I've been thinking.

I believe it is best, Portia," raising his tone somewhat. "You are not going to oppose me?"

The girl was now kneeling on a footstool by his couch. She was hanging over him, but she did not touch him. She smiled at him so that his eyes grew somewhat brighter.

"I ought to shrink, to demur, to be womanly," she said. "But no; I will not do that. I am ready."

Moore suddenly put his hand across his brow again. But at the same time his other hand grasped Portia's.

"That is so good of you," he said, gently. "Now let there be no delay. Ask Mr. Scudder to come in here. Ask him to come immediately."

There was something like irritability in Moore's manner.

Portia left the room. She was pale, and her lips were compressed so that they showed but a thin line of scarlet.

Nely informed Miss Nunally that her father had gone to the mill, and that he would not probably be back before supper-time. Was there anything particular wanted? Did they want Dr. Sands? Was Mr. Moore worse?

But Portia turned away with a shake of the head. She was in no mood to talk to Nely, who was now opening the pods of her shell-beans.

When Mr. Scudder did return he was sent immediately in to see the young man. Mrs. Scudder sat down to wait her husband's return. She said she guessed she could bet what Mr. Moore wanted. She added that things were happening so fast that for her part she was dizzy with them all.

When, after a five-minute interview, her husband appeared, Mrs. Scudder remarked that she wasn't going to wait an instant; "jest tell her in one word."

Mr. Scudder put his hands in his pockets and grinned as he looked at his wife.

"One word it is then," he answered. "Minister."

Mrs. Scudder showed some signs of becoming flustered; but she made a great effort towards self-control.

The man walked to the door.

"I'm going to harness," he said. Mrs. Scudder followed him, catching a shawl from a hook as she did so.

"If you get flustered, Rebecca," said Mr. Scudder, sternly, "I d' know what I shall do."

The two went to the barn together. They both considered it fortunate that Nely was out of the way; she had, in fact, gone to see Salome.

"Shall you go for the Baptis' or the Orthodox?" inquired Mrs. Scudder, ignoring the fact that the Baptist might also be orthodox.

"Orthodox," was the brief answer.

Mr. Scudder had slipped the halter from the horse, and was holding its head under his arm with the bridle in his other hand.

"It's further," remarked Mrs. Scudder.

"Not much. 'N' Mr. Pope needs the fee, I reckon. I wonder what Mis' Hill will say."

Mr. Scudder chuckled.

His wife drew her shawl tighter round her head. She was asking herself what S'lome Gerry would say, but something kept her from putting that thought into words. She was conscious of a great strain on her mind to keep pace with events.

"It always seems a bad sign for a girl to be married 'thout no wedding-dress," she remarked.

Mr. Scudder paused in the act of backing the horse into the shafts.

"Wedding-dress!" he cried in scorn. "Women are queer things. Now, I'm thinkin' of the young feller. He don't seem quite right to me, somehow. But then I didn't use to know him, so mebby he does seem right, after all. Back-sh-sh! I say," to the horse, which cautiously placed himself in the shafts and stood motionless while the harness was hitched to him.

"I do hope Mr. Pope won't think strange," said Mrs. Scudder, tremulously.

"I don't care a darn whether he thinks strange or not,"

was the masculine rejoinder. "Now I'm goin'. You may tell the young feller that I've gone. I ought to be back in an hour, I should think."

Mr. Scudder drove leisurely out of the yard. Miss Nunnally, in the small chamber above, saw him go, and knew why he was going.

It has been stated that the Scudder steed was not given to prancing rapidly through space, and it was with extreme slowness that it now turned the corner of the road and was at last out of sight.

Portia knew that Mr. Scudder could not return in less than an hour. She felt it impossible to stay quietly there in that room.

She must move, walk ; some way she must counteract the excitement which ruled her.

She left the house and went quickly across the field. But first she looked in at the door of Moore's room. He was still lying on the lounge, and, curiously, she thought, he was still holding his hand over his eyes.

Mr. Scudder was not afflicted with too much uneasiness. He was resting, and he had been hurried all day. He leaned forward on his knees, and allowed Molly to walk as she would. He was old enough to know that there was always plenty of time to marry. He considered that the whole affair was getting to be tedious. He didn't know how the women folks kept up such an interest in it.

The narrow road twisted among bushes and young trees. The bushes grew to the wheel ruts, almost. It was nearly dark. The air was sweet, excessively sweet. The man snuffed it with a dim kind of pleasure. The crickets were very loud in their calls to-night.

There was somebody in advance. It was a girl. It walked like Salome Gerry. She had turned into the road from a path ahead, and was going forward at a quick gait.

In a few moments Mr. Scudder, who had hastened Molly a little, overtook her.

"Hullo, S'lome!" he said, cheerfully, "goin' my way? Better git in, hadn't ye?"

Salome turned and said:

"Good-evening, Mr. Scudder."

He saw that her hands were full of the white spikes of the clethra. The flower looked ghostly white in this semi-darkness, and the warm, damp air brought out its odor almost overpoweringly.

"Better git right in," repeated the man. He was still resting comfortably on his knees. There was time enough.

"Thank you," said the girl. "I'm not going far; I was only out for a walk."

"All right. Bet you can't guess where I'm bound," Mr. Scudder laughed. "You may guess all night and you couldn't do it."

"Then I won't try."

Salome leaned against the wheel. The perfume of the flowers she carried seemed to fill the air.

"There's a little too much of that smell for me," remarked Mr. Scudder, critically. "But I can't stand laylocks even, when Nely has 'um round. So you ain't goin' to guess?"

"How can I?"

"Well, you needn't try. But we are havin' things happen over to our house now, I tell you. We c'n hardly keep track of 'em all. What do you say to a weddin' jest for variety?"

Salome stood up and away from the wheel.

"A wedding?" she said. "You must mean Mr. Moore and Miss Nunally?"

"Exactly. I'm bound for Mr. Pope's now. When do you s'pose Mis' Hill 'll git wind of it? Don't you go 'n' tell."

"Oh, I won't tell. You may trust me," answered Salome.

"I d' know what my wife 'n' Nely 'll do if things keep up at this rate," remarked Mr. Scudder. "I guess I'll be

goin'. So you won't let me give you a lift? Be a joke if both ministers were gone, wouldn't it? I'd keep right on to the Far Corners in that case. Got to git a minister somehow."

Molly, urged by lines and voice, now resumed her walk, while Molly's master said to himself: "S'lome's all right. Guess there wa'n't nothin' in that notion 'bout her 'n' Moore."

Salome, after Mr. Scudder had driven out of sight, sat down for a few moments by the road-side. She fell to arranging carefully the flowers she carried. She seemed greatly absorbed in her occupation. But in a very short time she rose, stood an instant, as if not knowing which way to go, then walked forward in the direction from which Mr. Scudder had come.

She walked so fast that it was but a brief space of time before she entered the Scudder house. The lamps were lighted, but there was no lamp in Mr. Moore's sitting-room. The nurse was strolling in the yard. Salome did not speak to any one. She nodded at Mrs. Scudder, who was adjusting a collar to her best black dress before the looking-glass that hung over the sink.

The girl saw that there was a familiar figure in the dusk of the sitting-room. She stepped hesitatingly within the door.

Moore leaned forward from the depths of a large chair.

"That is not the nurse?" he said, sharply.

"No," was the answer.

Moore rose and extended his hands, but he sat down again quickly, and put a hand for an instant up to his head.

"I wish you would come close to me," he said. "Why do you stand off there? I knew when I heard your step in the yard that it was you."

Salome advanced and put her hand in his extended palm.

After a momentary silence, Moore spoke, in something of the tone of an invalid who must not be crossed.

"How cruel you are, Salome! You have not been here once since I've been shut up in this house. Perhaps you didn't know I was here?" hopefully.

"Yes, I knew."

Salome did not think it worth while to explain that she had been there at the very first.

"You knew? Oh, Salome!"

Moore grasped the girl's hand in both his and bent his forehead to her fingers. Her other hand, full of the clethra flowers, hung by her side. The room was filled with the strong odor.

"I don't know why it is," said Moore without raising his head, "but sometimes I don't feel as if I thought quite clearly. I suppose that will pass away."

"Yes," said Salome, "that will pass; and you will be well again."

"Kneel down by me," presently said the young man.

She knelt down as he had said, and he put his head on her shoulder.

It was Moore who broke the silence that followed.

"Why should we ever part again?" he asked.

There was no answer to this.

"You sent for me," said Moore, "and I came. Something seems to have happened since; and I think something happened before. But it is no matter, not the slightest. We are together now, and we will stay together."

Moore felt the girl's form vibrate beneath his head.

"I don't seem to care really about anything else," he continued, "only that we shall be together."

Salome dropped her flowers and clasped her arm about Moore's neck.

She was remembering what she had promised her mother, and she was thinking that she should keep no such promises. To keep promises? In the next moment she had even forgotten them.

"I saw Mr. Scudder," she said. "Yes," said Moore, with some suddenness. "I sent him; but — why," with

greater force, "I'm not going to marry her. I thought it would be best. But since you have come; Salome—"

The young man stopped. He pressed his head still more closely on the girl's shoulder.

"You arrange it," he said. "I want you to arrange it—so that we shall not part, Salome. Be sure that you arrange it so that we shall not part. Nothing else is of any consequence."

Salome was motionless as she knelt there, supporting Moore's head.

A carriage entered the yard. Mrs. Scudder, who had found that she could not distinguish a word those two said, hurried to see who had come. She told herself that Dwight could not have been to Mr. Pope's and back again, unless Molly had flown, and it was not Molly's habit to fly.

Nevertheless, it was Mr. Scudder who spoke from the carriage.

"In luck this time, Rebecca," he said; "I met Mr. Pope coming over here to call; so I took him right in. He knows what he's got to do. It don't take a minister long to catch on to a wedding now, I tell you."

The two men laughed.

"Walk right in," said Mrs. Scudder with formal politeness. "Miss Nunally, she went out somewhere; you see we wa'n't expectin' of you for an hour or more. But I guess it won't make no difference. She'll be sure to be right back. You ain't none acquainted with Mr. Moore, be you, Mr. Pope?"

X

A MARRIAGE

THE minister stood, large and portly, with his black coat buttoned tightly about him. The kitchen ceiling seemed very low with him beneath it. He held his hat in his hand, glancing about him. He was conscious of feeling a great deal of curiosity, but he tried to conceal that emotion.

The next room was not lighted; the one kerosene lamp was on the sink shelf in the kitchen.

"No," said Mr. Pope, "I have never met Mr. Moore. I hope he is doing well."

"Oh yes, I expect so," was the answer; "but if I'd stuck to mustard plasters jest 's I'd begun—"

"Rebecca," interrupted Mr. Scudder, "I guess mebby 'tain't no time for mustard plasters now. Mebby you'd better interdooce Mr. Moore; then if the minister wants a little talk he c'n have it. Take this lamp right in 'n' I'll light another."

Conscious of having her best black dress on for the occasion, Mrs. Scudder took the lamp and preceded the minister into the sitting-room.

Salome had risen and was standing near the chair where Moore sat.

Mr. Pope's eyes first rested on her face. She smiled and answered his "Good-evening." For some reason Mr. Pope found it difficult to withdraw his glance. Salome Gerry had always been more or less of a puzzle to him; he had never known definitely whether he approved of her or not.

"Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Moore, Mr. Pope," said Mrs. Scudder, in that exceedingly proper voice

which some people use for introductions. It always made her feel of some importance to introduce two persons. She hastened out now as the two men shook hands. She went for the "centre lamp," an article with a large globe and some pieces of glass dangling round it. This always stood on the "centre table" in the middle of the parlor, which was at the other side of the house.

Mrs. Scudder was sure that this lamp ought to be lighted when there was a wedding in the house.

"I'm lookin' for Miss Nunally every minute," she said, as she deposited the lamp on a stand. "We wa'n't expectin' of Mr. Pope so soon. If Nely was to home I'd send her out after Miss Nunally. But I guess she won't be long."

Moore had shaken hands mechanically with the minister. He had responded to that gentleman's remarks, but he did not conceal his impatience.

"We will not wait," he said.

"What?" said Mrs. Scudder, blankly. Her mind immediately went back to the time when she did not use mustard on that young man as she ought.

"We will not wait," repeated Moore, sharply. He turned towards Salome, who had been standing near. He extended his hand. "Come," he said.

Salome took a step nearer and put her hand in Moore's, which closed strongly over it.

Mrs. Scudder ruffled like a bewildered hen.

"But, but," she began, "you'll have to wait, you know; she ain't come, you know."

Mr. Pope hardly knew what to say. His underlying thought, however, was that a man generally knew what woman he wanted for his wife, and that he should rather let the man himself decide than any of the people who might happen to be near. Of course the Scudders had made a mistake; that was the extremely simple explanation.

Moore put his disengaged hand on the arm of his chair and stood upright. There was his old manner discernible as he turned his head towards the minister.

"Will you marry us," he asked ; "directly?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Pope, stepping forward.

Mrs. Scudder ruffled more and more. She said afterwards that she "felt as if she was jest about crazy." She actually stepped between the minister and the two who stood in front of him.

"She 'ain't come yet!" she cried again.

"Rebecca!" cried Mr. Scudder from the doorway, where he had just appeared from the barn. Mrs. Scudder drew back. Her husband told her that it wa'n't none of their business; and gen'rally speakin' a feller knew who he meant to marry. He s'posed they hadn't understood it. He could not help adding under his breath that he didn't believe the devil himself understood it. He advanced and seized his wife by the arm as if to keep her by force from interfering any further, and he held her so tightly that she writhed in his grasp. She besought Dwight in a loud whisper to go out 'n' see if he couldn't find Miss Nunally. In reply, Dwight shook the woman slightly. He said he wasn't going out.

Mr. Pope did not apparently notice this interview between husband and wife. He was silent for a moment, standing before the man and woman.

There was no possible mistaking their meaning. Moore's attitude was erect and imperious. He was holding Salome firmly by the hand. She was not looking at him or at any one. She seemed to be gazing into space. There was an indefinable glory in her eyes which even Dwight Scudder perceived. Afterwards he confided to his daughter that somehow Salome Gerry's face that night made him shiver, and he didn't expect he should live long enough to forget it.

Even when Mr. Pope began to speak, Mrs. Scudder made a final squirm in her husband's hold, and said in a half voice that she didn't think Miss Nunally 'd be gone more'n a minute, 'n' they might just as well wait.

This time Mr. Scudder did not reply. His eyes were fixed

on Salome. He heard her say "Yes" in the lowest possible voice, but in one that was clearly audible.

Moore's tone was too loud ; he seemed in a hurry. The instant the very short ceremony was over he sat down in the large chair from which he had risen. He kept his hold of Salome's hand as if he feared that some one would try to deprive him of it. He did not in the least notice Mr. Pope when that gentleman attempted some words of congratulation.

Seeing this, Mr. Pope immediately desisted and turned away, going back into the kitchen, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Scudder.

The nurse, who had also been a witness of the ceremony, joined the group in the kitchen.

A somewhat significant silence was upon these people.

Mr. Pope had directly taken up his hat and gone to the door, where he paused. His face showed perplexity and possibly misgiving. At last he said, looking at Mr. Scudder :

"It's all right, I suppose?"

Mr. Scudder shook himself with considerable force before he replied in a violent whisper :

"Of course it's all right. Why shouldn't it be? We ain't goin' to dictate to a man, be we? I don't s'pose it's any of his business if we'd got another woman into our heads."

"Dwight," said his wife with severity, "it was another woman. I ain't a fool. I jest do wish I'd stuck to that mustard. I—"

"Oh, shet up!" in uncontrollable excitement from Mr. Scudder. "Rebecca, you'd ought to use your common-sense if you've got any to use. Mr. Pope, I c'n drive you home 's well 's not. Only my mare 's so slow that you won't git home no quicker 'n if you walked."

Mr. Pope said he was much obliged, but he would rather walk ; he wanted the exercise. He did not say that he was in a hurry to go. As he put his hand on the door latch the door was pushed in from the outside, and Miss Nunally entered. The group instantly drew back.

Portia was conscious with a peculiar keenness of the gaze which the nurse fixed upon her. She resented that gaze, and stared haughtily back.

The unusual brilliance of the light in the next room was noticeable. She remarked it, but supposed that Mrs. Scudder had thought best to illuminate with that sacred centre lamp on account of the marriage ceremony about to take place. And this must be the minister.

Portia flushed as she glanced at Mr. Pope.

The strange emotion that had come to her the instant she opened the door increased until in a moment she felt choking; and she could not tell why. She did not show that she was choking, however. She stood with her head flung up.

Mrs. Scudder forgot to introduce Mr. Pope; and Mr. Pope could only gaze stupidly at this brilliant vision of a girl that had suddenly come in out of the darkness.

Had she expected to be married to Moore to-night?

The minister hurried from the room. He was vaguely indignant that he had come at all. But why should he not come? And what was the matter here? What had been the talk about waiting for Miss Nunally? That was Miss Nunally, he supposed, who had just come.

But the young man and Salome Gerry, who had just been married—they were old enough, surely, to know their own minds.

Mr. Pope, as he strode along the dark, solitary road, had some shadowy compunctions as to what he had done. He had lived long enough to learn that what his wife often told him about himself had some truth in it, that he was not always equal to emergencies. He could not be sure of himself to act quickly and rightly at the same time. And yet what should he have done?

He had heard about the Scudders finding that young man, and taking him home. He had heard that Moore's betrothed had been sent for, and had come. Until within a week Mr. Pope had been away for his vacation. When he came back his wife had related the occurrences of the par-

ish to him. His wife was one of those who firmly believed that Salome Gerry had been "disappointed," and that the disappointment was connected with that young man who had been hurt. Why hadn't somebody found out how he had been hurt? What if he had said he had had a little quarrel with some one and had come to blows, and he had happened to get the worst of it?

Mrs. Pope always wound up these private conversations on this topic with her husband by saying that she "couldn't help loving Salome, but that she didn't know about her; she couldn't quite make her out."

"But then," with a sigh, "it isn't necessary that I should make her out."

Mr. Pope wondered what his wife would say when he told her that he had just married Salome to that young man at Scudder's. And now the minister felt sure that the other young woman had expected to be married to-night.

Mr. Pope smiled somewhat grimly in the darkness. He thrashed his cane with unnecessary violence against the bushes by the wayside.

When he came to a road which branched from the main highway and led towards the house where the Gerrys lived, the minister paused. He was seized with a strong wish to talk with Mrs. Gerry. Did she know? He was sure she did not. In the five years during which Mr. Pope had been settled over this parish he had learned that Mrs. Gerry was one whose integrity was a part of all her life.

He did not hesitate at the corner long.

"I will go and see her," he said aloud.

At the Scudder home there was a curious absence of any melodrama when perhaps melodrama might have been expected.

Portia stood there in the kitchen for the briefest space of time. Then she entered the sitting-room, where the light was brilliant upon her and upon the two other occupants of the room.

Moore was leaning back in the large chair, while Salome stood somewhat behind him. The young man's face was dark with the rush of blood to it; but Salome was pale, and there was a radiant solemnity upon her countenance. Her eyes met those of Portia in a steady gaze.

It was then that Miss Nunally showed that she was thoroughbred. Her slight figure stiffened as if with steel. The gleam of her eyes was unswerving.

"I'm sure I ought to congratulate you both," she said.

"Yes," replied Moore, emphatically.

His gaze clouded as he continued, with an effort,

"Perhaps there are explanations, apologies, Salome," turning to her; "are there apologies?"

Before Salome could reply Portia spoke again:

"Oh no! no apologies between us, I am sure. Only congratulations for you both; and good-night, and good-bye. I shall catch the next train to Boston, and be at the North Shore again in a few hours."

She turned away. She paused in the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Scudder with unusual affability. That lady was now so completely bewildered that, as she afterwards expressed it, she did not know whether her head was off her shoulders or on.

Portia met the gaze of the nurse with so calm a stare that the nurse's eyelids drooped and she flushed with anger.

It seemed for the moment almost impossible not to think that they had all been mistaken, and that this was not, after all, the woman who had expected to marry Mr. Moore to-night.

"Well!" said the nurse, with a long breath, as Portia left the room.

Mrs. Scudder's eyes were protruding in what seemed to be a physically painful manner. What she said was that she never expected to see straight again.

The nurse sat down. She hardly knew what to do. Her one dominant emotion was admiration for Miss Nunally.

Before any one had spoken the door through which Portia had left the room was opened again, and she appeared. She looked across the nurse to Mrs. Scudder. She asked if Mr. Scudder would take her to the station.

The woman thus addressed put her hands to her head helplessly as she answered :

"I d' know. Where is Dwight?" It transpired that Dwight had gone to the barn to see, as he explained afterwards, if he could find his wits. So Portia went to the barn in search of him.

Salome saw her go. She glanced down at Moore, whose head was thrown back against his chair.

"I must speak to her," she said, hurriedly.

"Yes," was the answer, "but it's all right. Nothing is of any consequence since—" Moore paused at this word, looking up at his companion.

In a moment Salome had left the house and was hurrying across the yard towards the barn, which loomed blackly in the dim light.

The wide door in front was rolled back, as also the door in the rear, so that a line of clear sky, faintly tinged with apple-green, was visible. Against this light, at the farther opening, Salome saw Portia's figure standing without motion. She almost ran towards it in her fear lest Miss Nunally would escape. But Miss Nunally made no movement to go. She simply turned her head slightly towards the new-comer and was silent.

There is nothing more confusing than silence can be at times ; and nothing more effective in putting one in the wrong.

Salome had thought as she had hastened from the house that there was a torrent of words ready for her lips to utter. What had just happened had come so suddenly, so overwhelmingly, it had carried her off her feet, metaphorically speaking, and in her present mood she felt that love justified anything. She had broken her promise to her mother ; she had aided Moore in breaking in an unmanly way a solemn

engagement ; she had thrown herself headlong into the deed which had been done to-night. Still, as she looked at the girl before her, she felt also that she did not repent in the least. In fact, she was not given to repentance. Sometimes, for her mother's sake, she thought she ought to feel like repenting. But there was not the slightest use in life if it must be given up to that kind of thing. Nevertheless, Salome knew that there was a sword-thrust in her soul as she stood there. She believed that she had a right to marry Moore, since they loved each other ; still—

Salome's hands unconsciously shut tightly as they hung down by her side. She was aware of an indescribable suffering at which she rebelled. Since the man she loved, and who loved her, was now her husband, surely she ought not to suffer in this way.

"Portia," she said, after having waited a little, hoping that Portia would speak.

"Yes," was the reply.

"I came out here to speak to you," said Salome.

"Yes," said Portia again. Salome felt her lips stiffen. But she persevered in her attempt.

"I wanted to tell you—I wanted to explain—I wanted you to understand—"

Here there came a long pause, during which the crickets in the newly gathered hay in the loft pierced the air with their combined shrillness.

"It was so sudden," said Salome, weakly.

No response ; not even the monosyllable.

"I wish I could make you understand," began Salome again.

The other girl remained silent.

"It was not planned at all," hastily went on Salome. "It—it just happened ; and oh, Portia, I love him so !"

Portia turned quickly. She seemed about to speak ; but she only laughed instead.

"I mean that my whole life shall be given to him ; I mean that he shall be happy."

Salome's voice thrilled upon the words. Still the words seemed poor and cheap to her. She was confident that no one in the world had ever loved as she loved.

Miss Nunally faced round now fully towards her companion.

"You have begun well," she said.

"What?"

Salome, like all sensitive natures, was half afraid of omens and of anything which she did not understand. Why did she at this moment recall with a shudder how the crows had flown above her and Moore on the Florida coast? But those days were gone. Everything was different now. Now she was going to be happy.

"Salome," said Portia, still feeling strongly that vague wonder as to why she did not hate the woman before her, "I must tell you one thing which you do not seem to know. It's the rock ahead of you."

Salome clasped her hands. She was so much under the control of emotion that she was half afraid of herself. She was dimly aware that it was a good thing to have a grip somewhere—a grip that never yielded. Her mother had that.

"There's a great difference between Mr. Moore and you," said Portia, with a kind of grimness. "It rather relieves me to tell you that he is honorable, and you are dishonorable. When he finds that you are dishonorable—"

"Oh, stop! stop!"

Salome's cry was uttered in a low voice, but it was very sharp.

"The truth won't hurt you," continued Portia, calmly. "It does me a lot of good to tell you the truth. I don't boast about myself, but I've told you there are one or two things I couldn't do. Even if Mr. Moore wanted to break with me he would never do it in this way. He would have a manliness about it. He would not be mean. He would not leave me to come into the house, as I did to-night, expecting to marry him."

Here the speaker made a gesture which was more full of meaning than her words.

"Let us have it out," she said, speaking faster and faster as she went on. "I shall die if I don't have it out. Mr. Moore isn't quite himself—you know that. And yet you yielded, for very likely he asked you to marry him now. He will be himself after a while. The doctors say so. Then your punishment will begin. I don't care anything about your being punished. It's the oddest thing in the world that I have a sort of love for you, in spite of everything. It's the oddest thing about you, Salome, that, no matter what you do, the thing in you that makes people love you is still in force. You haven't any conscience, you haven't an idea of some kinds of honor, and yet how is one going to help loving you? Look at me! Look at what you've done to-night! For all the whole of it, I'm drawn to you as you stand there, with that face of yours gazing at me like that. What do you mean? What are you, anyway? You're enough to bewilder the clearest mind in the world. Now, I'm going. You must make Mr. Scudder come after me with his horse and carriage. I shall start to walk. I can't go into that house again. Salome, good-bye."

Salome started forward and grasped Portia's hands.

"Do you truly mean that when he finds out how wicked I am I cannot make him happy? Do you mean that?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, that is what I meant," was the answer; "but perhaps I am wrong. You do wicked things, and yet you yourself don't seem wicked. Oh, I don't understand anything! Now let me go."

But Salome held on to her companion.

"No, no! stay one moment," she exclaimed. "I wish you would kiss me before you go. Of course you never can forgive me; I can't expect that; do kiss me!"

This inconsistent and thoroughly womanly request was spoken in a pleading voice that made Portia angry that it affected her. Woman of the world as she was and well as

she knew herself, she was so confused now that she believed she should never see clearly again.

She hesitated an instant. She wanted to take Salome in her arms, notwithstanding all that she had done; but she despised herself for that wish. Then she drew the girl close and kissed her warmly.

"I shall try to make him happy," said Salome, earnestly.

"That won't do any good," was the response. "Trying to do that never does any good. If he keeps on loving you he'll be happy; but if he is one of the kind that gets tired he won't be happy. And if he really takes it in that you're not honorable—but there's no use in talking, and you can't explain love. I wonder what my aunt Florence Darrah will say to me now. It does seem really impossible with the best intentions for me to marry."

Portia made her final remarks in the most cynical of tones. Having made them she hastened down the yard towards the road, and the darkness enveloped her.

It was several moments before Salome felt that she was outwardly sufficiently calm to return to the house. She was conscious of a dread of meeting Mrs. Scudder and the nurse. But this dread was something quite superficial, for it passed off as soon as she entered.

Mrs. Scudder was glad of anything to do, and she began eagerly upon the task of getting her husband to harness and follow Miss Nunally. Mr. Scudder groaned and said that he had done nothing all day but harness and unharness. He said that it was diabolical that the Nunally woman should insist upon going before morning. The word he used was "devilish," and he furthermore added that the devil must have entered into all the women at once, and that if this thing continued he himself should be carried to an asylum. But he harnessed, nevertheless, and drove along the road to overtake Miss Nunally. His wife shrieked after him that she hoped he would happen to run across Nely, who had gone to see S'lome, and had missed her somehow. Mr. Scudder replied that he'd rather come

home 'n' unharness 'n' harness 'fore he went for Nely, and with this piece of humor he also was swallowed up in the darkness. His wife stood listening to the sound of the wheels as they rolled deliberately over the damp gravel.

This sound was what Mrs. Scudder called "so natural" that for a time it seemed to her that she might herself come to feel natural again.

She went back into the house thinking that as soon as she had cleared away the breakfast in the morning she would go over to Mrs. Hill's. She would give herself the enjoyment of telling that woman what had happened before any one else could possibly find out and tell.

The minister, meanwhile, had kept to his sudden resolution of going to Mrs. Gerry's. When he reached the cottage and saw the light burning he could not help pausing and thinking that he would turn back. But he could not thrust it from him that perhaps it was his duty. And there was a tonic power in Mrs. Gerry's character that he was in need of now. He was quite aware that he required bracing, and he did not like to think of any unsympathetic person telling Mrs. Gerry what had happened.

His knock was promptly answered. He looked with something like furtiveness at the woman who conducted him to the little sitting-room. She was pale and calm. But he had seen her glance anxiously out behind him towards the road as if she were expecting some one.

"Did you meet Salome anywhere?" she asked. "She is such a hand to be out of doors that she takes long walks—longer than she ought, I'm afraid."

The two sat down. Mr. Pope asked if Salome was well now.

"Oh yes; don't you think she looks so?" with some anxiety. "Have you seen her lately?"

Mr. Pope paused so long before he replied that Mrs. Gerry's face grew quite rigid. She sat quietly, however, and waited. She had suspected something as soon as she saw the minister.

"Have you seen her lately?" she asked again. "I hope," in a low voice, "that if you have anything to tell about her you will tell it quickly, Mr. Pope."

The man's heart leaped in involuntary admiration as his eyes met Mrs. Gerry's glance. He reached forward and held out his hand. The hand put in his was cold and steady. He grasped it tightly.

"It's not so very bad," he said, hurriedly, "only I think it must be unexpected to you. I hope it's all right. I've just married her to that young man at Scudders'. Mrs. Gerry—!" as his companion rose quickly.

Mrs. Gerry stood an instant in that motionless attitude which sometimes is so expressive. She had controlled the impulse to exclaim. Now she said:

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Pope, I think I will go to her."

The man had risen when she had risen. He saw that Mrs. Gerry could not talk. He did not know but that she would wish to be alone, but he felt as if he could not let her go by herself. He still kept hold of her hand, as if by that means he could somehow comfort and strengthen her. And yet she seemed far stronger than he.

"I wish you'd let me bring my wife to you!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, thank you," was the answer. Mrs. Gerry withdrew her hand. "I think I'll go to my daughter," she said.

She looked round in a blind way for her shawl. She found it, and wrapped it methodically about her, pinning it in two places with her chain shawl-pin. She said again that she hoped Mr. Pope would excuse her. Would he please go? She was going to blow out the light.

Mr. Pope obeyed her; but he waited just outside the door, and begged her to let him go with her. He ventured to say that perhaps things were not so bad as she feared. Then he was afraid that he had not said the right thing. He was hurrying on beside her.

"They must be bad," she said. She felt that she might speak freely to her minister; and to speak now might re-

lieve her so that she could keep later that necessary grip. But she spoke with apparent calmness.

"But surely—surely," began Mr. Pope. Then he paused. It was humiliating not to be able to hit upon anything appropriate to say, particularly when it was part of his business to be able to say appropriate things in time of trouble.

Mrs. Gerry walked so fast that it was difficult to keep beside her.

"Everybody will judge her so harshly," said the mother. "Oh," with a sudden break in her voice, "I wish we were away—away, no matter where. And Salome is wrong. I can't justify what she does. That is the worst of it all; even I can't justify it."

Now that she had begun to speak, Mrs. Gerry felt the relief of speech. There is nothing in the world more exhausting than the strain of that continuous self-control that never loses its hold, and nothing more narrowing. That the evil in one's nature should be held unceasingly in check—that is self-evident. But that delusion under which some natures live that spontaneity in itself is evil takes half the loveliness from life; its iron bands cramp everything; that glowing impulse which springs in beauty from the heart—catch it, analyze it, catalogue it, take forever from it its exquisite aroma. Continue doing this and in time you will be in that correct state when you will have no glowing impulses; then life will be as simple as it will be uninteresting. But you will always be quite able to calculate upon a machine. Still the action of machinery is not life; and life and individuality surely were given that they might still continue life and individuality.

Mr. Pope had drawn Mrs. Gerry's hand through his arm; he had adjusted his step to hers, and without her realizing that he did so, he was helping her to get over the ground much faster than she could have gone alone.

"I wish I knew what was best, what was truly best," Mrs. Gerry said. "Mr. Pope, sometimes it comes over me with awful force that perhaps I did not bring her up right."

She breathed heavily, but she would not slacken her pace.

"You did as well as you could," said the minister, gently.

"Yes, yes; but I may have been wrong. Only to think that I may have been wrong! She must have known better than to marry Mr. Moore now. He is not fit to judge for himself. He was engaged to Miss Nunally. He has broken his engagement, and I'm sure that she is to blame. Under the circumstances she must be to blame. Mr. Pope, what is it that makes her seem good even while she does bad things? Is it only because I am her mother?"

"I suppose she seems good because she is so," was the rather unorthodox reply of the minister; and he was so lost to his creed as to go on and say:

"We must judge people by their tendencies rather than by their actions."

Mrs. Gerry looked with a piteous eagerness towards her companion. She could not help placing a good deal of weight upon what a minister said. A minister was called of God; it was proper and natural that he should know about right and wrong.

"But," she said, hesitatingly, "our actions spring from our tendencies, don't they?"

Mr. Pope did not reply immediately. He was asking himself several questions, and he could not answer them.

Finally he said he believed that some people were a great deal better than their deeds, just as he was sure that some of us were a great deal worse than our deeds.

Having spoken thus much the two walked on in silence along the lonesome road. It seemed to Mrs. Gerry that breath and strength could hardly hold out through the distance. And now, though her first impulse was always to go to her daughter, she began to ask herself why she should go now. What could she do? For the first time in their lives there came to her the chill sense that Salome, perhaps, was removed from her. Well, that, too, she must bear. She had borne a good many things. That was mostly what life meant to her—to bear things.

When the two reached the door of the Scudder house the minister was strongly tempted to run away; and being thus tempted, he was quite sure that it was his duty to remain.

But Mrs. Gerry decided that matter for him by saying, in a hesitating manner, that she supposed it was of no use to try to do anything about it now; and it was of no use anyway, for Salome always did what she pleased, and you couldn't be sure of anything about her.

The minister was turning away when his companion said, "Mr. Pope, I wish you would pray for us—pray for Salome."

Mrs. Gerry paused before she added, "I wish you would pray that Salome may—may do right."

"I will; I will," was the answer in an unsteady voice. But Mrs. Gerry's voice had not faltered. And now as she knocked on the door the lines of her face were firm.

The face that immediately confronted her was, however, what might be called broken up in its lines. Mrs. Scudder was in the highest state of fluster. She seized Mrs. Gerry's shawl and pulled her in.

She confided to Mrs. Gerry her fear "that she shouldn't never know nothin' agin," and also expressed a doubt as to whether she ever had known anything.

These words, coming from a large woman, dressed in her best black gown, with a wide cotton-lace collar painfully arranged about her neck, were very impressive.

But Mrs. Gerry hardly heard them and made no attempt to reply. What she said, in the most matter-of-fact way, was that she thought, under the circumstances, that Mr. Moore might better come over to her house; she was quite sure that she and Salome could take care of him. She added that he would soon be well now, and could then make what arrangements he pleased for himself and Salome.

These words were spoken so calmly that Mrs. Scudder almost believed that she should come out of her fluster before they knew about it. Still, there was a little resentment in her tone as she remarked that it was lucky that Mis' Gerry could always be so ca'm. It must be so convenient to be one of the ca'm kind.

XI

SOME MONTHS LATER

Two women met at the door of a dry-goods store on Summer Street, in Boston. They bowed and smiled at each other and said, "Good-morning"; then they passed on. But the elder of the two, who was leaving the building, paused when she reached her carriage. She had opened the door of that vehicle, but she shut it again. She hesitated still further. Then she glanced up at the coachman and said:

"You may wait a few moments longer."

She returned to the shop and walked slowly down the aisle, looking about her. She was smiling very slightly to herself, as if what she was about to do was but the following out of a whim.

Presently she saw the figure she was in search of, and she hastened towards it.

"I have come back that I might ask a favor of you, Mrs. Moore," she said.

"Oh," was the reply, with a quick smile, "I shall so like to grant you a favor."

"But wait until you have heard what it is. Come and sit here a minute with me."

The last speaker turned towards a couch near the entrance to the elevator, and the two women sat down upon it.

"You know I've only met you twice," she continued, "but somehow I can't seem to forget you. Perhaps you've noticed that it is not always the people you've met a great many times that you think of most?"

As this remark was made with a questioning inflection,

the other answered with some emphasis that she had sometimes thought that the oftener you met people the less you thought about them.

The other woman laughed as she said, "I didn't mean anything quite so bad as that ; still—"

She bent forward slightly and put her gloved hand in the lightest manner upon the gloved hand of her companion.

"Has any one told you that I paint a little, Mrs. Moore?"

Salome's reply was somewhat eager.

"I knew that when I first heard your name," she said, quickly. "And I have seen some of your pictures. They go right to my heart. Oh, Mrs. Bradford, you love the country as I do!—the country with the hot sunshine on it. I wish you would go to Florida and paint just a stretch of beach and the water as they look at noon when there is not a cloud in the sky. You would know how to paint a scene like that. There would not only be color, there would be heat and light, there would be the South in it."

Having spoken thus with more enthusiasm than is customary in what is called "society," Salome paused and added more moderately that her husband always insisted that it was a great mistake to call her a Yankee girl.

"I think he secretly believes that I am really a creature born in the tropics, and that for some reason I have chosen to make believe that I am a New England woman. But, Mrs. Bradford, I do wish you would go to Florida and paint such a picture ; and I would buy it ; and then I should always have a bit of the South with me."

Here Salome felt that she ought to be confused because she had spoken so freely to Mrs. Bradford, whom she admired greatly and whom she knew so very slightly.

But there was something in her companion's smile and in her eyes that prevented any embarrassment, that even seemed to encourage Salome.

"It's another kind of a picture that I want to paint now," responded Mrs. Bradford, "and I am almost afraid I'm taking a liberty in asking for the opportunity."

"Oh, no," said Salome, not in the least suspecting, and very curious.

"Well, then, I want to paint your portrait. I wanted to paint it the very instant I looked at you. Only I can't do it as I ought. I'm sure I can't. Mrs. Moore, do let me try."

It was Mrs. Bradford who now spoke with more earnestness than was usual in what is called "society." But she was subject to lapses into too much earnestness whenever she touched upon the subject of her art.

Salome gazed at her companion in astonishment.

"To paint my portrait?" she asked, with a dwelling on the possessive pronoun.

"Yes, even yours. Is that so surprising? I should be willing to assert that Mr. Moore would not think it surprising. And when it is done you may make him a present of it—that is, if I succeed, partially. It would be out of the question to expect to succeed wholly with a face like yours. I wish you would go home with me now. My carriage is here. Please come; and don't say I'm presuming. I am in the mood to begin a sketch of you. And a woman must take advantage of moods, you know. I know just how I shall take you. It shall be the front face, with your eyes looking directly into mine. Please come."

Mrs. Bradford had risen. She held out her hand and Salome rose also. She was feeling very glad to be with this woman. She had not supposed that she should ever know Mrs. Bradford. She was not at all in Mrs. Bradford's "set," and had only happened to meet her at the house of a friend.

She could not be aware that Mrs. Bradford cared not the least in the world about "sets."

The two went to the carriage and were driven away. They hardly spoke during the drive, yet Salome was not conscious of any embarrassment from the silence, even though in that silence she was looked at a good deal. At last her companion withdrew her eyes as she said:

"You must pardon me. I know I am staring in a dread-

ful way, but I'm getting points for my picture. You may pretend that I am going to make you famous. Imagine an art reception and people crowding up to a certain canvas and asking each other, 'Who is she?' and answering, 'Why, don't you know? That's Mrs. Randolph Moore.'"

Salome laughed in that way that shows that a laugh is very ready to come.

"No; that is not what they will ask," she responded. "They will inquire who is the painter."

"And if they do they will decide that the artist was not worthy of her subject. But I'm going to try. I've only painted a few faces; yes, I'm going to try."

Salome was almost afraid that she would show too childish an interest.

"And will you have it labelled 'Portrait of a Lady'?" she asked.

Mrs. Bradford turned to Salome with that direct and yet gentle way she had. And she put a question in return:

"Do you want to know one reason why I am so eager to paint you?"

"Yes; please tell me."

The other did not smile. A look of deep seriousness was in her eyes, as she made answer:

"It is because you are happy. I have always wished to paint the face of a happy woman."

Salome's hands beneath her mantle clasped themselves together. She did not flush now any more than she had ever done; but the clearness of her face was illumined by that curious white light which comes to some faces, and which means so much more than color.

"Are happy women so very rare?" she asked.

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Oh," exclaimed Salome, "I can't believe that."

"Can't you? That shows that my impression of you is correct. But don't you think we are talking very unconventionally?"

"Very. But that's the way I like to talk."

Salome was somewhat confused with the delight of being so suddenly and informally in the presence of this woman whom she had admired afar off on those two brief occasions when she had been with her. And she wondered that she felt so much at home.

"And it's the way I like to talk, too," said Mrs. Bradford. "That's the reason I'm not a good society woman."

"But you are—you are. You are my ideal society woman," exclaimed Salome.

"Your praise is very sweet," said Mrs. Bradford, letting her delighted eyes rest upon her companion, "but you are wrong, nevertheless. There are a hundred people here in Boston who would tell you so. I have never learned what to say; but I sometimes know what not to say."

"My husband thinks—" here Salome paused, shyly. She had just recalled that an acquaintance had warned her that very morning that she really must stop informing people as to what her husband said or thought; that she must remember that the world at large was not at all interested to know what were Randolph Moore's opinions about anything. Randolph Moore's wife had acknowledged that this must be true; but in the bottom of her heart she could not help pitying those poor people who had no chance of knowing what Moore's conclusions were upon different topics.

"What is it that your husband thinks?" inquired Mrs. Bradford with such an appearance of interest that Salome forgot how she had been warned, and replied enthusiastically:

"He believes that it is of a great deal more importance to know what not to say."

"In that case I need not be discouraged," was the response.

"Oh, Mrs. Bradford, don't laugh at me! I know it is silly to quote Mr. Moore so much."

"No; it's delightful."

"It's delightful to me," was the charmingly candid re-

sponse, and Salome hardly knew why her companion laughed with such amusement.

After that there was another silence which was not broken until the carriage stopped before a house in that old part of the city where there is something besides "style"; where, in short, there is that true flavor of Boston which is at once so penetrating and so charming.

To Salome, who was staying at a new and what might almost be called a shining hotel in new Boston, this locality had a look of something very nearly like shabbiness. Still she could not tell why she liked it so well. She supposed, however, that it was because it was where Mrs. Bradford lived. Mrs. Bradford was certainly one of the real kind—the real Boston kind.

Salome had not yet discovered that this lady had only belonged to the real kind some half a dozen years; and that she was in truth even now no more than a country girl like Salome—no more, only, perhaps, a great deal different.

When the door was opened to them the elder woman, remarking that they would go directly to the studio, led the way to the rear of the house to what is technically called an "extension." Here was a small room with a northern aspect.

Having closed the door, Mrs. Bradford threw off her wrap and bonnet and began removing her gloves with some appearance of eagerness. She walked about as she did so.

"I'm so glad I met you," she said, again. "I was thinking of trying to find out your address. It is possible that I should have been so bold as to call on you. That would have been proper, of course, but—"

"I am not in your set," said Salome, as her hostess paused. "I don't know a single human being in this part of Boston. I should not have thought that I could ever enter a house like this, where—where—"

Here she also paused before the vastness of her subject. Her eyes shone. She was openly gazing about her at the

pictures set against the wall ; at the canvas on the easel ; at the casts and busts and draperies. It was not an elegant studio like the scene of the pastime of a woman to whom to be here was merely a pastime. It was a real workshop, as Salome felt. She had not expected this. She had supposed she would be brought to a place that was fitted up beautifully, and where the artist amused herself. It is true that there was nothing here that swore at anything else, that there was a kind of unconscious harmony ; but it was plainly merely a workshop, and not the lounging-place of a woman who was but indulging a fad.

"Where," said Mrs. Bradford, taking up her guest's remark, "the very cobwebs are cobwebs of old Boston families, and are like the same thing on wine bottles brought up from the properest wine cellar."

She had thrown off her gloves and her wrap, and was taking the half-finished picture from the easel that she might put a plain canvas there.

"Yes," said Salome, "I think that must be exactly what I was going to say, only my reverence, you know, prevented me."

"Naturally. Now please take off your hat. Run your fingers through your hair on your forehead ; or permit me to do it. There. Ah, truly I'm in luck ! I suppose in the days when gods and goddesses came down occasionally from Olympus, there were to be seen faces on this earth like yours. But not since then. No, not since then, surely."

The speaker stepped back a few paces gazing with earnestness at the face before her. She returned to her easel. The fresh canvas was in place. She took a clean palette on her thumb and a brush in her hand, and stepped back again, looking at her sitter at a different angle. There was a flush on Mrs. Bradford's cheeks and a steady glow in her eyes. Salome, contemplating her, could not understand it in the least. Of course a woman like that could do good work. But as for her, Randolph Moore's wife—well, she could not imagine anything unconnected with Randolph

Moore that could excite so deep an interest in her heart. She told herself, however, that people were different. But to her happy consciousness those words did not mean anything.

It was a delightful thing to sit in this room and have a woman like Mrs. Keats Bradford want to paint you, and she would keep the whole thing a secret from Randolph, and when the picture was done she would make him a gift of it. She could see his face now as he first looked at the portrait; she would tell him why it was that this artist had wished to paint it; it was because she was so happy; and then perhaps he would insist upon her telling him why she was happy.

These thoughts, which seemed even more feelings than thoughts, came in an agreeable confusion, hurrying after each other as Salome remained quietly where Mrs. Bradford had placed her. Then she thought that perhaps she would, after all, tell Randolph and ask her hostess if she might bring him there some day. Of course Mrs. Bradford, or any one, would like to meet Mr. Moore. That is, they would certainly like to meet him again after having seen him once.

Mrs. Bradford continued for a few minutes to walk around in front of her sitter and to look at her from different points. At last she said:

"I was right at first. One must be able to gaze straight in the eyes of this portrait. There is no other way. Oh, I shall not need to name it—not if I can put in this look. Do pardon me, Mrs. Moore, I'm not really daft, though I seem so. Now let me take a palette with some colors on it. It's not so much the color now as the drawing. Do you mind looking directly at me? Yes, like that. It is not necessary for me to ask you to put on a pleasant expression. Let us talk. Have you been in town long? Has any one asked you how you like Boston?"

"I've been in town about three months. Yes, every one has asked me how I like Boston."

"And what do you tell them?"

Mrs. Bradford was making rapid strokes, and then drawing back to look at them and at the woman in the chair in front of her.

"I tell them that if Boston were only in the South somewhere, Boston would be Paradise."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Bradford, absently. She was making some touches and was absorbed in considering their effect. In a moment she appeared to come back to the realization of something or somebody being present with her.

"You seem to love the South, Mrs. Moore," she said.

"Oh, yes, I love it."

"Perhaps it was there that you first met Mr. Moore?"

The speaker looked at her companion and smiled encouragingly. This smile somehow went straight to Salome's heart.

"Yes; I did meet him there," she answered.

"I understand," was the response.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Bradford, but I don't think you do understand. If I had never seen Mr. Moore I should love the South just as well. But you make me talk about myself. I don't think one ought to talk about one's self, do you?"

"That depends."

Another silence, which was broken by an exclamation from the artist:

"If I can only get your eyes!"

"They're hazel," explanatorily responded Salome.

"Oh, I don't mean the color—I mean the expression."

Silence again. Salome found that she was gazing directly at her companion, whether they talked together or not. She was becoming more and more interested. She smiled to herself as she thought of bringing her husband to see this picture. And Mrs. Bradford would know directly she saw him that it was perfectly reasonable for her, Salome, to be so happy.

In a few moments the artist sat down in a chair in front of the easel. She still kept her palette on her thumb, and occasionally she touched her brush to some of the pigments with an absorbed air. She seemed not to be really present; and yet she still appeared keenly interested in the work she had begun.

She noticed that it was when Mrs. Moore was quiet and her face in repose that it wore most strongly the expression she wished to depict. It was then that the eyes had that look of intense happiness that so strangely strikes the beholder with a kind of terror. Is it that we instantly say to ourselves that no human being has a right to be so happy as that? That to be thus happy is but to make one's self a mark for the gods to aim at?

It is true, however, that few of us poor mortals are capable of this kind of rapture when to live is an ecstasy; when to know that for us there are eyes whose glance gives us what we ask is to know everything that we long to know. This is the kind of happiness that to the observer suggests the deepest pathos—if he understands it. If he does not understand it he calls it abnormal, and passes on to that lower grade of enjoyment which he does understand, and which is therefore strictly normal, and to be tolerated.

But Mrs. Bradford understood it. And perhaps that is why she should feel the tears so near her eyes when she met her companion's glance.

All at once she laid down her tools.

"I can't paint any more to-day," she said, with something like abruptness. "But I have made a beginning. If you will come to-morrow at ten in the morning— Or is it too much to ask? Do I seem presumptuous?" She held out her hand.

Salome put her own hand in that extended to her.

"May I look at it?" with a recurrence of shyness. She had been thinking that she had been unwarrantably familiar with this lady, who lived in what she now called to herself the most cobwebby part of Boston.

"Yes, you may see it."

Salome walked with some hesitation in front of the easel.

"Oh!" she said, softly. She turned a wondering gaze at her companion.

"Do I look like that?" she exclaimed. "But that is impossible. That is — why — Mrs. Bradford, that is going to be beautiful! And I am very plain. I have always been plain."

"Have you?" with smiling incredulity.

"Truly I have always thought so. And how have you done so much in this hour? It seems like a miracle."

"I thought I could catch the likeness the moment I saw you on Summer Street this morning, and I have been at work"—she took her watch from her belt—"I have been at work almost two hours. You have inspired me, Mrs. Moore. Do you like it?"

She stood with her guest and contemplated the canvas, her own face glowing with that exhilaration which comes from working when the conditions are right.

"You know I haven't a good feature in my face," murmured Salome, looking at the picture.

"Haven't you?" Mrs. Bradford said, as before she had said, "Have you?"

"No; that is, my mirror tells me so."

"Very well; we won't quarrel with your mirror—not to-day; though I might speak of your eyes and mouth. Still, if a face is not actually deformed, features count for very little."

"You, an artist, say that?"

"Yes, certainly, and I love form as well as any one. Come, let us have some lunch."

Mrs. Bradford led the way back into the house. They sat down in the dining-room before a lunch which Salome afterward described to her husband as precisely the lunch that was appropriate to be served in Mrs. Bradford's house. This was rather an indefinite description, but it seemed to

be all that Salome was able to give. The two were alone. Once when Salome, hearing footsteps in the hall, glanced expectantly at the door, her hostess said :

"Mr. Bradford is out of town, or you would meet him. To-night I shall present to him my sketch of you. I shall have an unprejudiced criticism, in one sense. For he has never seen you. I am looking forward to his thinking it is an ideal head."

"I have been wishing I might meet him," said Salome. "And yet I'm afraid. Does he know—"

Here she paused so long that her companion said in a quiet tone that was yet full of significance :

"Yes, he knows."

Salome involuntarily sank back a little more in her chair with a feeling of relief and content, believing now that it might be possible that Mr. Bradford was worthy of Mrs. Bradford. She thought that she recalled hearing Moore say that he had met Bradford, and that Moore had spoken well of him. She was not quite sure of this, however. But a man whom this woman loved—while he could not be as worthy of love in every way as Randolph Moore, he might still be an extremely good sort of man.

When Salome at last walked down the steps of the Bradford house she had promised to come again the next morning, and she had obtained permission to bring her husband "just for a moment."

She went rapidly across the common, her head slightly thrown back, her eyes introverted, not really seeing anything save in a way that served to keep her from coming in contact with people or things. And yet her senses were ready to be alert at the slightest summons.

She moved with a sort of pliant grace that seemed to have something exultant in it. Sometimes men and women who were not too much absorbed in themselves turned to look at her. And these men and women always smiled first, and then sighed.

A large, elderly woman, with gray curls each side of her

face, dressed with perfect appropriateness, and preceded at the distance of two yards by a small, long-haired terrier, saw Salome coming along the path near the State House. She looked full at the other as they met ; she paused as one pauses who is not quite decided whether to pause or not. But when she spoke there was no hesitancy in her speech.

"You'll forgive me, I'm sure," she said, "because old people have whims. I want to shake hands with you. I've just been talking with a man who asserted that there was no real happiness in this world. My dear, you'll shake hands with me, won't you?"

Salome smiled as she held out her hand. She was a little shy, too, and she was not sure that she quite liked it that her very appearance advertised to strangers that she was not—well, that she was not wretched.

"Thank you," said the old lady. "I only wish that the man with whom I have been talking was with me. But it does not matter ; he may continue living in his benighted condition. Good-bye. I'm glad I met you. I call it good luck."

Each went her way, the elder woman going leisurely on in the precise direction from which Salome had just come. And she rang at the same door through which Salome had just passed. The servant who let her in evidently knew her well, for he immediately informed her that his mistress was "in the stoo-dio," whereupon the visitor walked directly to that place and knocked at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Bradford, who was enveloped in a long white pinafore, and who had her palette in her hand, and the handles of two small brushes between her lips. These last she immediately removed as she greeted her visitor.

"If you had been any one else I wouldn't have let you in," she said, cordially.

"Then this is one of the times when I'm glad I'm myself," was the response. "But I don't come nearly as often as I want to. You know I have to walk every day ; it's dreadful to grow fat as you grow old. Let me take a bit

of this drapery for my terrier to lie on. My terrier is fat, too. There, now we are both settled. Go right on with your work. I like to see you paint. But I always have a teasing desire to paint you when you are painting. I met a girl on the Common just now. I wish I had caught her and brought her to you. You could have made her portrait and called it 'Happiness.' What a lovely thing it is that once in a while a woman may be happy! Are you at work on anything very important?"

"Of course. I always work on important things."

"I know. And everybody says that your 'Still Pool in Spring' is extremely important. But, somehow, I don't care so much for that still pool as the critics seem to care. I like the white birches about it."

The two seemed so much at home with each other that there was entire silence for a space. At last the visitor, having ceased to be short-breathed from her walk, rose and came round in front of the canvas.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. Mrs. Bradford looked at her in surprised expectancy.

"Well, Mrs. Sears, what is it?"

"Why, it's my happy girl! So you've found her, too! I'm glad of it. You can paint her, if any one can; and then, when the thing is exhibited, people will walk up to it and wonder why you chose such a subject, and they will say you chose from a fool's paradise. But who would not choose to be a fool like this?"

Mrs. Sears stood long before the sketch. Her face grew very serious. Finally she walked back to the lounging-chair and sat down without speaking.

Out-of-doors, in the clear sunshine that had some warmth in it, Salome was hurrying along to the hotel which, for the time, was her home. When she reached it she did not care to take the elevator. She still wished to be moving. She felt the exhilarating possession of abounding life.

She hastened along a corridor on the second flight. With her key in her hand, she stopped before a certain door. But

this door was immediately opened from within. A tall fellow, with a closely-cut yellow beard and a general expression which was not an expression of misery, gently took Salome's arm and drew her into the first of the two apartments that were splendid with the upholstery and the white and gold of a gorgeous hotel.

"I knew it was your step," said Moore, leading his companion forward a little, apparently that he might look at her better.

"Now, don't tell me that," she said; "you couldn't hear my step over such carpets as this magnificent house has on its floors."

"Well, I knew it was time to hear your step," answered the young man, "for I saw you cross the street about three minutes ago, and I calculated. You walk up the stairs; you appear here; I open the door, for I have been waiting for you half an hour. I have had no lunch; I am starving. I declined lunching with a friend so that I might get back to you the sooner, and I find vacancy, desolation."

While he talked Salome was looking at him as she took off her gloves and pulled the pins from her bonnet. Though he was smiling and talked easily, though his face showed his joy at seeing her, a faint film of cloud came over her spirits. She could not guess what it was. She was sure it was something.

She had been eager to tell her husband of the incident of the morning. But now she asked instead:

"Randolph, has anything, the least little thing in the world, happened?"

XII

"THAT LITTLE RIFT"

FOR answer Moore put his hands on Salome's shoulders and looked down at her. She met the gaze with clear, questioning eyes that might have helped to disarm even a stern judge, and this man was a lover and not a judge. His face grew more and more wistful and puzzled.

Finally he dropped his hands and turned away.

"I cannot understand it," he said, as if to himself.

Salome's lips set themselves a little. She was afraid, but she was only vaguely and indefinitely afraid. When one is happy fear is never far away. She walked quickly to a chair and sat down. She managed to control her voice as she asked:

"What is it that you cannot understand? Is it anything about me?"

"Yes, it is all about you. I suppose that it isn't to be expected that women should have the same regard for truth that men have—" Here Salome became a degree paler. "Women are very different. They have their faults, and their virtues. You can't judge them by the same standard as you use in judging men. Isn't that the way it is?"

Moore was walking about the room. He was continually glancing at his wife, who returned his glance. He seemed to be trying to arrive at something; struggling for some light that should dissipate a darkness that was about him. His face showed suffering and an intolerable perplexity.

"Isn't that the way it is?" he repeated, stopping in front of his companion. "It's just because you are a woman,

isn't it, that you don't—that you can't—tell the truth always?"

He felt that his last words were brutal, but he had to speak them.

Salome's white face was still turned steadily towards him.

"There have been two or three little things about which you haven't been truthful—but I'm not going to talk about them. Perhaps it was a kind of inaccurate, feminine way."

He paused here, but he evidently had much more in his mind which he must express.

Salome was still silent. Moore walked to the end of the room and came back. He stood over Salome; then he put his hand with tenderest touch on her hair.

"It's just because you're a woman, isn't it?" he asked again. Then he whispered "Dearest," and dropped down on his knee beside her, resting his face on her shoulder as he had done before when some suffering was between them.

At last he said, still with his head on her shoulder:

"Something happened to-day so that I had to speak of these things. And you must forgive me. And don't you think it's best to talk things over and have the air cleared?"

Now he rose and began walking again.

"Yes; I think it's best," answered Salome, speaking quickly. "And it is not just because I'm a woman, Randolph. You mustn't try to think that. I can't hide behind that."

"Then what is it?"

Salome pressed her hand to her chest.

"Oh, it's all coming true," she exclaimed, with apparent irrelevance.

"What is coming true?"

"The bad omen—the bad sign—when the crows would fly over us in Florida."

"Salome—my darling—you really must not yield to any such folly as that."

Moore spoke imperatively. Salome was leaning far back

in her chair, her head resting against the dark velvet, her strained eyes intensely fixed upon her husband's face.

"I've tried not to speak of this," now went on Moore in his gentlest way, but with a certain firmness which showed that he was resolved to say a few things, "but I want to understand better if I can."

"You can't understand," said Salome. "I don't care for the truth because it is the truth. I told you that long ago. Perhaps you thought you could teach me to care. You could do it if any one could. I do try. But, somehow, it isn't in me. Falsehood doesn't shock me. If it's pleasanter, if it's going to be more comfortable—sometimes it doesn't seem as if I quite realized that I had perverted the truth. Oh, it's not because I am a woman, Randolph. Think of my mother! Do you think my mother would lie, Randolph? No, she wouldn't lie, even to save me."

At this there came such a look of agony on Salome's face that Moore suddenly stooped and took her in his arms. He sat down in the chair from which he had lifted her, still holding her closely. He bowed his head over her, murmuring indistinguishable words of tenderness.

She seemed to wish to say more.

"I've tried so hard," she said, "no—you need not stop me now—I must talk or I shall not be able to bear it. I tell you I don't have what the minister used to call a 'realizing sense'—I tell you I don't have it. One might think I love you well enough to do differently. I love you with all my heart. Do you think you know how I love you?"

She put her arm about his neck as she went on.

"Randolph, do you suppose it is possible to pluck out a trait bodily, as it were, and cast it from you, as you might take out a tooth or cut off your hand? Just pluck it out? Sometimes I think I've done it, and then when I have congratulated myself, I find all at once that I have not done it. And it does seem as if I love you enough to make my whole character over to please you."

"Hush! Salome, not to please me. But you know that truth is the foundation of everything."

"Oh, I know it! That's what my mother always says. So I know it is true. But I only know it intellectually, you see. I don't know it experimentally, as they say about religion."

Salome sighed deeply. She kept her face closely hidden.

After a silence, during which Moore's countenance showed his keen suffering and perplexity, Salome spoke again.

"What made you think particularly of all this, and of how wicked I am, just to-day?"

"I am not calling you wicked," he responded, hastily. "I can't make you seem wicked."

Her arm held him still more closely.

"What made you think of this?" she persisted.

He hesitated, then he said:

"I think often of all this; but the reason just now for my speaking, I suppose, is that I saw Mrs. Darrah this morning."

"Did you? Well?"

Salome now lifted her head. She looked inquiringly at her companion.

"Yes. She is at the Vendome. She was in a carriage, and she saw me on Tremont Street. She spoke to me, and asked me to drive with her a few moments."

"Well?" said Salome once more, and she added, "You knew all about the forged check long ago, Randolph, and you paid what mother and I had not paid. You were so good about that. You are so good, any way."

Her voice trembled and she put her head down on his shoulder again.

He did not say anything on the subject of his goodness. He did not think it was any great goodness on his part that had made him do as he had done. He loved Salome supremely. Of late he was beginning to believe that it was possible that he had been mistaken in that unspoken conviction which had been his, that, once Salome was his own,

to be with him always, then his influence, their mutual love, would work a change in her character. He could modify her, make her think and do differently in certain directions. Many of us are subject at some period in our lives to such a delusion. Perhaps in the first days of love we perceive our influence upon the beloved object, or we think that we perceive it. Of course we mean that it shall be an influence for good. We have an ingrained, life-long conviction which that dear one must share. But the days pass and she does not share it. But her trait, her belief, occasionally shows distinctly, as a sharp rock stands out boldly at low tide. There is the rock. There it will always be. Not that a mere difference of opinion is vitally separating in its effects, save when the difference is an indication of character.

Moore felt as he sat there holding his wife tenderly in his arms that for them to have opposite ways of valuing the truth was likely to be more disastrous than he could have anticipated.

He had more to say, and he was resolved to say it. But the saying was even more difficult than he had imagined it would be.

As for Salome, the mere consciousness that she was held lovingly in her husband's arms went a great way towards banishing anxiety. But the anxiety remained nevertheless, and the uneasy curiosity. For the last six months, and especially since Moore had completely recovered from the effects of his injury, Salome had been so happy that her only fear had been lest she was too happy. It is not during happiness that even the most conscientious are likely to feel the stings of conscience, and Salome was not naturally conscientious.

She now asked if Mrs. Darrah were coming to see them? or did she ask them to call? or had she forgotten them entirely?

It was the last question to which Moore found it easiest to reply.

"No, she had not forgotten us in the least. She inquired very particularly about you."

There was something in the tone in which this answer was given that made Salome sit upright. She had not seen Mrs. Darrah since that winter in Florida, now more than a year and a half ago.

Moore felt himself growing more and more uneasy.

"She said something which troubled you—something about me," said Salome, speaking very quickly.

Moore did not respond directly. He frowned slightly. Finally he answered :

"She referred to that time when I was injured. You know I never can remember clearly about that time. And a man hates to think of a part of his life when he was not quite himself—that he cannot recall. It gives a sort of helpless feeling."

"But it's all over now," returned Salome, "and you are entirely yourself. And we are very happy, aren't we?"

She stroked his face softly. He took her hand.

"Yes," he said, "we are very happy."

But there was something in his tone, gentle as it was, that chilled Salome. She knew that there was more that must be said ; and that it must be said now. She tried to speak lightly.

"What were you and Mrs. Darrah talking about?" she asked.

"Various things."

Moore still shrank from telling what was in his mind.

Salome's next question came rather hesitatingly.

"Is Miss Nunally with her aunt?"

"I judge not. In fact, I remember that Mrs. Darrah mentioned that her niece is in Florida this winter with some friends ; in St. Augustine."

"Oh ; is Miss Nunally married?"

"No. Salome," with a visibly painful effort, "I may as well say what I've got to say first as last. After my mind had cleared, and I was really recovered from the effects of that blow, and you were my wife, you remember that I asked you how matters were arranged with Miss Nunally. I was

engaged to her, you know. Try all I may I cannot recollect how things were settled. I have cloudy memories, but nothing clear, nothing satisfactory. It is like trying to look into a darkened room, where there is a little, a very little, light, that is really more confusing than darkness. But I've told you before that I couldn't remember."

"Yes," said Salome. She did not add that she had been glad that he could not remember. She said in a moment, however, that at the time he had seemed very much like himself.

"After you were better, you know. Not exactly yourself, but not very much different," with an endeavor to be accurate.

"And when I asked you how it was about Miss Nunally," went on Moore, "for you know that if the engagement between her and myself was to be broken I wanted it done in an open, honorable way, you told me—Salome, do you remember what you told me?"

"I remember."

"Yes; and so do I, for that was when things were natural to me again. You said that she believed that I should never be myself again; that she thought of my love for you, and considering all things, she released me; and then I wished you to become my wife immediately."

"Yes," said Salome, "that is what I told you."

"I recall our marriage in a curious way, without the right perspective somehow. But I continued to grow better. Things became clearer. There was some talk of another operation, as if there were still some pressure on the brain, but it turned out that this was not necessary. Perhaps I was so happy that I could not help getting well. No, don't interrupt me now," as Salome was about to speak, "if I am interrupted I shall not be able to go on, for I am going to say something which it seems almost impossible for me to say. I am going to tell you what Mrs. Darrah told me this morning."

Here, in spite of his assertion that he could not go on if

he paused, Moore's speech abruptly seemed to end. His eyes were persistently turned from his companion, and there was so much suffering visible in his face that Salome, too tender-hearted to be able to look at him, suddenly rose from her place in his arms and sat down with averted head, waiting until he should go on. She could not interrogate him any further. She must wait.

Moore straightened himself and clasped the arms of his chair.

"I thought first that I would keep this from you," he went on after a silence, "but you would know instantly that I was keeping something. You dive right into my heart; I can't keep anything from you. But I meant to try. You know how you began to question me the moment you came in. Mrs. Darrah told me that Miss Nunally did not break her engagement to me; that up to the very moment of our marriage, it was she, and not you, who expected to be my wife. She gave me no details. She seemed to think that I knew all about the affair, or I am sure she would have been silent on the subject. But after she had made a remark or two I suppose my face must have betrayed my ignorance, though I made every effort that it should not do so."

Now that Moore had spoken what was in his mind, he turned to look at his wife, impelled by an irresistible longing to comfort her. He went to her side quickly.

But she shrank somewhat, and he stood irresolutely near her. He was thinking that he had never before known his full capacity for suffering.

Salome looked up at him; but apparently she could not continue looking at him.

"I meant to ask you something," she said, presently.

Having thus spoken, she appeared to find it impossible to go on. But she did succeed in saying in a dry voice:

"I want to ask if you regret that it was not Miss Nunally instead of me—"

"Salome, be silent!"

Moore spoke with such sharp command that his wife

could not recognize his voice. She was not silenced, however. She only shrank a little more, still keeping her gaze upon his face.

"I want you to answer me," she insisted. "Tell me whether you are glad I am your wife; whether you ever regret for an instant that it was not that other woman whom you married. I don't care how it happened that you did marry me, are you glad I am with you? Now tell me the truth. You needn't spare me. But I shall know whether you tell me the truth or not. Answer me."

As she finished speaking Salome had risen from the chair in which she had seated herself.

She had somehow the aspect of a creature who is about to fly. Moore felt as if he must detain her by force, and yet there was something which just now prevented his touching her. He involuntarily glanced at the outer door and wished that it was locked.

"If you don't know how I love you," he began, "it is entirely useless for me to tell you. You know I came to you—you know I told you I loved you—you know—but, good heavens! Salome, what's the use of talking? I haven't got any words. I can't say anything! Not anything. No man in this world was ever so happy as you make me. You know it, too."

Salome had put her hands together as she listened to him. There was a clear shining coming upon her too sensitive face.

"And you are glad I am with you?"

Moore could not help smiling at this very feminine reiteration. He felt that the tension upon her was too great.

"Don't you see that I am perfectly wretched with you?" he asked, trying to speak lightly.

She sighed deeply. Then she also smiled slightly as she said:

"Then you have disguised your feelings; for, really, you have seemed happy."

It was Moore's inclination to reply lightly again, but it was impressed upon him that he must not drop the subject

yet; he had not yet made his point. It seemed to him that he must make Salome understand what was in his mind. But it was very hard for him to know how to say what he was thinking. He saw that she was longing to let the matter pass out of their thoughts if possible; that she wanted to get out of these clouds into sunlight again. Now that she was satisfied with his attitude towards her—as, indeed, why should she not be satisfied?—she considered that this talk might be forgotten altogether. But he must go on. She saw that he had still more to say, and her face clouded again.

Moore walked to her side and put his arm about her. He had a feeling that he wished to protect her even against his own words.

“One thing that hurts me is this,” he began, resolutely, “that I seem to have behaved in an unmanly and horribly ungentlemanly way to Miss Nunally. I tell you I can’t bear to think of it!”

Moore’s face flushed deeply as he spoke.

“Don’t feel so,” said Salome, tenderly; “you know there is every excuse and explanation; you were not yourself. I think everybody understood that you were not yourself. So you were not responsible. Do you know,” looking up at him intently, “that if I ever suspected that you didn’t love me with your whole heart, your very whole heart, I should tell you that the lawyers might think you could easily be free of me. I don’t understand about it, but I should think if you pleaded that you were not quite yourself when you married me—”

“Salome, how can you be so cruel?”

Moore’s voice burst in upon his wife’s words.

“Well, I mean it,” she went on. “If the time should ever come when I didn’t make you happy—”

Here she was unable to continue.

“It’s perfectly ridiculous for you to talk like that,” said Moore, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact way. “It’s morbid and unhealthy; perhaps it’s even abnormal,” he tried to

smile, his lips moving in that mechanical way which is much worse than no attempt at a smile. Then he said, hurriedly:

"I'm going to have this thing out now, and then be done with it. Salome—" he paused as if, after all, it was really impossible for him to go on; then he took her face between his hands and said, his voice almost breaking as he spoke:

"Salome, I do wish that you hadn't told a—that you had told the truth to me about Miss Nunally and me. She didn't break the engagement. You said that she did."

Salome's eyes seemed to dim over with darkness instead of with tears; her face was drawn.

"Yes," she responded, "I said so."

"But it wasn't true," said Moore.

"No; but I knew you would be so much happier if you believed it, and we have been happier; oh, Randolph, don't you think we've been perfectly happy?"

"Yes, yes, you know I think so. But don't you see we are not talking about that now? Don't you see what I mean?"

Moore was in despair. The acute misery in his wife's face was terrible for him to see, and yet, having spoken thus much, he must go on.

"I mean," he said, "that I wish you hadn't told me what you did: it wasn't true, you know."

"No," she repeated after him, "it wasn't true. Randolph, perhaps, after all, you can't respect me. You know I told you long ago, when I confessed to you about that check, that I was afraid you couldn't respect me; and that I was afraid you wouldn't be happy with me. And now you're not going to be happy with me."

She withdrew herself from him and sat down. She did not fling herself down. She was very quiet. Instead of covering her face with her hands she put both hands upon her chest and pressed them there rigidly.

Moore felt wretchedly helpless, and he felt also that this scene should not continue. It seemed to him that it would kill him, strong man as he was; but, he told himself, he

could bear it ; but Salome could not ; it was cruel to allow her to bear it.

"How silly we are !" he exclaimed. "Let's be reasonable mortals instead of hysterical creatures. Come, Salome, look at me ; be happy with me ; for we are going to keep right on being happy. Dearest," he sat down by her again, his sense of his love revealing itself in his tone as he spoke that word, "don't let's be silly any longer. Let's have our lunch. We are half starved, that partly accounts for this scene. You need a cup of tea and I need a chop. The world will look differently to us then. Only, Salome—" he had her in his arms again now, "do, do think a little more of the truth. Won't you? And please don't tell me things that are not true."

"Oh, I will try. But, Randolph, I don't feel about such things as you do ; and I don't know how it is, but I'm not at all sure that I shall think in time — and things look differently to me."

Having spoken thus in a tremulously earnest voice, Salome laid her cheek against Moore's and whispered :

"You still think you can be happy with me?"

"I'm still sure of it—sure of it," was the ardent whisper back.

Then Moore thought of the "higher life," and all his theories and aspirations.

"But I suppose happiness isn't the main thing, after all," he said.

"That's what mother says," was the response. "But we can't help longing to be happy, can we? And we seem made to be happy, don't we, since we have such a capacity for happiness? Dear love," with her cheek again upon his, "you will never, never know how I love you."

Moore assured her that he knew at that very moment.

Presently the two went down to lunch. As they sat at the table they talked gayly in that reaction which is likely to come after such an hour as they had just spent.

After lunch Moore was obliged to go out directly. He at-

tended to some business with his usual interest apparently, but he knew that he had really little interest in it; it was only a mechanical habit of mind that asserted itself. In the recesses of his thought was an indefinite dissatisfaction with the way he had talked to his wife. He had been quite sure he could speak more to the point than he had done; he had failed to impress her as he meant to do. He did not quite know how or why he had failed. And how dear she was to him! How she was knit into his very heart! Some time he would be able to say to her just what he wished and as he wished. And there was in his consciousness that background of troublous memory of the way he had treated Miss Nunally. It was but a humiliating kind of comfort to think that he had not been "quite himself." No one likes to think of a time when he was not quite himself. He wondered what else he did during those weeks. He knew he had married then. He remembered distinctly the moment when he had stood by Salome in the little sitting-room of the farm-house, and when he had answered the minister's questions. He remembered precisely the tone in which Salome had replied. But he could only recall in the most misty manner the fact that there had been a clergyman present.

But he was glad that Salome was his wife. When he reached that point in his often-repeated attempts at a clear recollection, his heart always bounded with thankfulness that Salome was his wife.

This afternoon, when it came towards night, he did not go directly back to his hotel. He wanted to be alone for a time. Salome's presence still had power of glamour over him, and of confusion to calm thought. And he wanted to think calmly. As he sat virtually alone, however, in a room of a club which he sometimes frequented, he could not but ask himself of what use it would be to him to think matters over. It is not after things have happened that it avails to think them over, unless it be with reference to future happenings.

But Moore sat there staring in front of him, his lips shut tightly and his hands deep in his pockets, after the manner of some men when they think they are thinking deeply. He was not aware for a long time that he was merely in a reverie, and the background of this reverie was always Salome. What was the use to wish that she was different in that one particular? He had known before. He knew that if he had known even more, he should have married her, if possible. He loved her. Continually those words came to his consciousness, and almost to his lips.

But how would things have turned out if he had not been hurt? Salome had sent for him; he was not free, but he had gone to see her, and he had found that he loved her more than ever. He supposed that he ought not to have gone to her; he ought to have written and explained. But he simply could not do that. Perhaps there were some men who could do that kind of thing.

Here Moore made an involuntary movement of indignation. He became aware that he could not sit still any longer. He went out into the street and began walking rapidly. He knew that the course of his life seemed changed by that blow from Walter Redd. Still, could he have seen Salome again, as he fully meant to do that night, and have gone away and fulfilled his engagement to Miss Nunally?

Again, perhaps there were some men who could have done that. Moore was indignant with such men.

He walked down Washington Street, glad that he could bustle almost roughly against people as he went. As the moments passed, the delightful knowledge that he loved and was beloved overcame every other emotion or thought. And his future was settled. The woman whom he loved was to be his all their lives.

He turned and went back swiftly towards the hotel. But as he went he could not keep down the wish that she might be different in just one vital respect. Still, in this glowing mood, he again began to hope that he should be able to change that trait in her character. Surely his love was so

great, his influence visibly so great, that he should in the end accomplish the result that was so really necessary. He was young enough and he loved enough to be absolutely sure of this before he reached the hotel. He was now in that childish mood when he would rather run up-stairs than wait for the elevator.

When he reached the landing he drew out his watch. It was not yet seven. He and Salome would dine directly, then they would go to see some play. There was nothing better than a good play and good acting to take up a person's mind. And Irving and Terry were in town. Yes, it should be Irving and Terry. He would see about the tickets as soon as he had consulted his wife.

How very foolish he had been to be so depressed! In another moment Salome would be looking up at him, and in her eyes would be that gladness which was his dearest welcome.

It was simply impossible to be seriously troubled concerning anything since he had Salome; he could not possibly be unhappy for, as he triumphantly quoted to himself, "Love was lord of all."

The young man's face was radiant as he opened the door. But Salome was not in either of the rooms. It had happened two or three times when he had come home earlier than usual that she was out; now he was later than usual. His heart contracted with that acute fear which is always ready to come when one loves.

Moore looked about him. He was actually afraid that he should find on the pin-cushion the regulation note which the heroine of a novel always puts on the pin-cushion when she is intending to run away either with a lover or by herself.

Yes, there was the note. Moore walked up to it as if he were walking to the cannon's mouth. He could not keep his hand from trembling as he took up the envelope. His unintentional look in the glass showed him a face so white and full of fear that he could hardly recognize it.

"DEAR RANDOLPH,—I am going to pin this on the cushion because you must have read stories enough to know where to look for a note, if I'm not at home when you come in. I don't want to go, but Mrs. Darrah has sent a carriage from the Vendome. If I stay to dinner do come after me. She has been so kind to me that of course I must go. And who knows but what I may give her material? I saw a paragraph the other day saying that the well-known authoress, Mrs. Florence Darrah, was engaged upon a long novel on the subject of general ethics. What is or what are general ethics? Here I am writing a letter to you. I do hate not to be here when you come. There are some street musicians outside under my window as I write. I wish they hadn't happened to play 'Good-bye, My Lover, Good-bye.' I'm going to give them half a dollar and ask them to play—you know what—that little thing you are always humming when you are in particularly good spirits. You see I can't seem to stop writing to you. Be sure and come to the Vendome if I am not back by eight o'clock.

"SALOME."

Moore sank down in a chair with the note tightly grasped; he was smiling tremulously, and there was a stinging in his eyes. The reaction from that first terrible feeling was too great. Salome was so intense; Salome was so—but he loved her.

XIII

WITH MRS. DARRAH

WHEN Salome was shown into Mrs. Darrah's sitting-room at the Vendome it seemed for a moment as if she had once more come to the Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine, and was to write at this lady's dictation. There sat Mrs. Darrah on a couch among shawls; two or three blue-and-green bound note-books were within reach. But the windows were not open to let in the soft, fragrant air of Florida; there were no palms within sight; instead, there were the naked boughs of the trees in the narrow park opposite.

Mrs. Darrah rose as Salome advanced. She held out her hand and pressed cordially the one given in response. She looked with undisguised keenness at her visitor.

"Do sit down," she said; "sit down opposite me in that chair, so that I may see you without twisting my head round."

Salome obeyed. She asked herself when the dictation would begin.

Mrs. Darrah leaned back, drawing a shawl about her.

"I suppose you have an idea you are happy?" she remarked.

"Yes, I have that idea," was the answer.

"No doubt. I saw Mr. Moore on the street to-day. He also has an idea that he is happy, too. Odd, isn't it? But then there are times in our lives when we all think we are happy. This is the time with you and that young man. Take off your hat and furs, please; you have an air as if you were going directly. You will stay to dinner, you know."

Salome rose and divested herself of her street garments.

"That is right. Now sit down again. Do you know, I almost want to dictate to you? I've always had a fancy that my ideas flowed better when you were my amanuensis. You know there is such a thing as some subtle emanation from a personality that stimulates one's mind."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Salome, as her companion paused. She laughed as she added that if that were really true, exactly the right kind of an amanuensis would be a great thing for an author. But Mrs. Darrah did not seem disposed to follow this subject any further in just this way.

She continued to contemplate Salome with a frank openness.

"You always were very suggestive," she said. "I'm so tired of the ordinary, commonplace human being. How long do you expect to be so happy?"

"Oh, don't ask me in such a tone as that!" exclaimed Salome.

"Very well. Is your mother with you?"

"No; but I go out to see her every week. She prefers to live in the country."

"I admire your mother."

The daughter's face lighted and her eyes sparkled.

Mrs. Darrah changed the conversation again with the abruptness which she seemed to consider it her right to use.

"Perhaps Mr. Moore mentioned to you that I accidentally spoke of a subject on which I supposed that he was well informed? I see he did mention it. I ought not to have been so careless. That was your affair, and his. Interesting, though, very. I've made notes of it. One never knows what one may want to use. And I wished to ask you if anything—now do pardon me, but I ask in the interest of my work—if anything you have ever done, any wrong thing, you know, causes you to be less happy? Would you mind answering?"

Salome could not understand why this question did not

make her angry. But there were a certain simplicity and singleness of purpose in the woman before her, and she had really been so kind to her that Salome felt no resentment. But she felt some confusion. She did not quite know how to answer.

"We have been instructed, you remember," went on Mrs. Darrah, "that our consciences make it impossible for us to be happy, even under favorable circumstances, unless our consciences are in that state which our orthodox forefathers used to call 'seared.' You are far too young for that process to have been accomplished. But you are happy, aren't you? Anyway, you have been happy since your marriage?"

"Yes, yes," replied Salome.

"And no moments of agony because of some things you have done?"

"No."

Mrs. Darrah reached for a note-book.

"Please forgive me, but I really must ask if the thought of the fact that—that you have allowed Mr. Moore to think as he has done of the circumstances of his marriage—has not that thought made you miserable?"

Salome's face was tense, and it was paler than usual, but she answered with that frankness which was characteristic of her when speaking of her inner self.

"No, I have not been miserable at all, except in the rare moments when I would have a fear that my husband would find out the truth. It was better, since he would be happier, and I also should be happier, if he never knew the truth."

Mrs. Darrah's little, alert face became yet more alert.

She began to write, saying as she did so :

"This is really charming—this is delightful. The amount of it is that you don't care in the least."

"Oh," exclaimed Salome, eagerly, "I care a great deal if somebody comes to know it and is made unhappy."

"But if nobody knows, and nobody is made unhappy because of what you may do in that way?"

"Then I don't care anything at all," with an accent of relief.

"That's just what I want to come at. How much would the best of us care for right, pure and simple, if nobody would ever know and nobody would ever be unhappy?"

Salome leaned forward. She put out one hand as if in emphasis.

"Oh, Mrs. Darrah," she said, quickly, "I don't understand why it is, and I'm not so one bit, but my mother is one of those people who do right because it is right. And since my mother does so, I have times when I long to be able to do so. I mean I used to have such times before I became well and happy. I wonder why it is, Mrs. Darrah, but when we are happy we seem to be good—even if we are not good, you know."

Salome spoke thus as if she were the first person who had ever puzzled over that state of being.

"Of course if I hadn't known that Randolph—Mr. Moore—loved me—if I had not known it beyond the shadow of a doubt, I couldn't have allowed things to go just as they did. But knowing that, why should I care too deeply for anything else? But my mother cares."

When Salome said "my mother cares" her voice trembled slightly and her eyes fell.

Mrs. Darrah ceased writing. She pressed the top of her pencil to her lips and silently contemplated the face opposite her.

"Do you know what is the most curious thing I ever knew?" she asked, after a moment.

Salome shook her head. She was still thinking of her mother.

"It is that my niece doesn't hate you, that she really has an affection for you. But still, when I sit here and look at you, I can quite understand that; whatever you might do, people would always feel, when in your presence, that, somehow, it wasn't the same thing for you to—to—forgive me again—to forge and lie as—"

"Don't!—don't!"

Salome's eyes dilated painfully, then she suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"You don't like the sound of those words?" asked Mrs. Darrah.

"No."

"But the deeds themselves—"

Mrs. Darrah paused. She held her pencil poised over a page of her note-book. She was telling herself that here was such an abundance of material that she was embarrassed by it. The subject of general ethics seemed yet more vast than it had hitherto seemed. She almost believed that she would be obliged to introduce two or three more characters into her novel; and she hardly knew whether even that change would avail.

"What I want to discover," began Mrs. Darrah again, "is why I'm not shocked and horrified by you, Mrs. Moore. I really am shocked and horrified by falsehood and forgery; and falsehood and forgery are the same things at all times. Of course, I know about extenuating circumstances and all that kind of talk. I've been through those things a thousand times; it's like a horse on a tread-mill; you keep going and you never get anywhere. Sometimes I'm not sure of anything definite. Now I should like to ask some one who could tell me why you should invariably give the impression of one to whom guilt of any kind must be utterly alien. Don't shrink so. I know I'm hurting you, but think of general ethics; think I'm only considering you as material, and you won't care in the least. Can't you throw any light on this subject, Mrs. Moore?"

Salome did not try to reply in words; she only shook her head distressfully. She was beginning to feel resentful, but she endeavored to stifle her resentment. She had a feeling that this kind of suffering was a sort of penance for what she had done, and that she must endure it.

"Your atmosphere," said Mrs. Darrah, "is one of special innocence. Now, how do you account for that?"

The authoress, who was particularly indolent as regarded bodily movement, now threw aside her shawls, rose, and began walking about the room.

Salome had flung herself back in her chair with a despairing movement. She was blessed with a sweet and forbearing temper, but she knew that her indignation could not be restrained much longer, even though she might view this hour as a penance. But then this woman had been very kind when kindness and consideration were worth a good deal.

"About your marriage," suddenly said Mrs. Darrah, pausing and gazing at her guest. "Of course you knew that Mr. Moore would learn all about it some time. Several people knew it. Some one was sure to tell him sooner or later. I'm sorry that I happened to be the one. You ought to have told him yourself."

"I thought—" began Salome. Then she broke off to say with some vehemence, "but why should I tell you what I thought?"

"Tell me. You certainly know I am your friend; and, contrary to the dictates of my judgment, I love you. You must have a great personal magnetism; but that doesn't account in the least for that wonderful impression of innocence which you give."

"Oh, Mrs. Darrah, won't you stop talking about me? I can't bear it any longer; indeed I cannot!"

Salome rose and took her fur wrap and began impetuously to put it on, saying as she did so:

"I haven't forgotten how good you've been to me, but this is more than I can endure."

Mrs. Darrah drew the garment from her guest with a gentle motion. She was smiling in that whimsical way she had.

"I'm afraid you are not considering the light I wish to shed upon the world on the topic of ethics, and you don't remember how much the world needs that light. But never mind. You are not going to leave me now. I'll put up my

note-books. Surely you can't ask me to do anything more than that? Now let us gossip."

Mrs. Darrah placed her hand for an instant caressingly on Salome's shoulder, then she bade her sit down again; and presently she said:

"Tell me about your mother."

Salome had resumed her seat. She seemed weary and dispirited, but she was plainly making an effort to overcome that state of body and mind. It is usually depressing to have a glimpse of the precise way in which other people look at us. She felt that she had to-night had such a glimpse.

"There is nothing to tell about my mother," she answered.

"She is out there in the country?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes; she preferred to be alone. We wanted her to stay with us, but she said she would rather live in the country. And she said—" Salome hesitated; there was a quiver about her mouth as she finished—"she said that she was sure I should be happier without her."

"She was right," decisively remarked Mrs. Darrah.

"She was wrong," as decisively returned Salome. "I am never happier without my mother."

"Dear child!" murmured the other in a voice much less dry than her usual tone. "But she must be wretched without you."

"Mrs. Darrah," said Salome, piteously, "I can't bear to be hurt any more this afternoon. It seems to me that I am always thinking of her. We are going South early next fall, and she has promised to go with us. She doesn't like the South, but I'm sure she will be happy with us—I'm sure of it," repeating the words fervently, "and this summer that is coming we mean to spend with her out there in the country where I was born. Randolph—Mr. Moore—loves the country as well as I do. But how I am talking

of my own affairs. You shouldn't let me do it, Mrs. Darrah."

"Yes, I should let you do it as long as you interest me," was the reply.

The two chatted on of this and that, and Salome recovered her spirits. The conversation she had had with her husband had only depressed her for the time; the buoyant reaction from it had not yet subsided; and besides, she was still absolutely sure of his love and of her power to make him happy. While she could be sure in that way it was simply impossible for her to be miserable.

Perhaps he was by this time back in their rooms—he was reading the note she had left for him—he would soon come to the Vendome. Her face grew radiant as the moments went on. She listened to her hostess, who, when she chose to talk, had a keen wit and a satirical way of putting things.

In a pause in the conversation Salome said:

"You spoke of Miss Nunally. Is she well and happy?"

In spite of herself she listened with a strained attention for the reply. She would hardly have been a woman if there were not some bitterness for her in the thought of Miss Nunally. But she did not now dwell upon bitter thoughts. Happiness crowded all unhappiness out of her heart.

"Oh," said Mrs. Darrah, "Portia is much as usual. She says that when she is a little older she is going to join some kind of a sisterhood and devote herself to good works. Portia is one who must have her fling. I advise her to be quite sure that she has had it before she joins that sisterhood; otherwise"—with a short laugh, "I should be sorry for that institution."

"She will marry," said Salome.

"Yes, eventually. Such a girl is sure to marry; but she really has no more vocation towards marriage than towards being a hermit. A hundred times I've thought I would wash my hands of Portia, but I can't—I like the girl; still,

I should be in despair if I were in any way dependent on her for happiness."

While she talked Mrs. Darrah did not try to conceal the fact that she was watching her guest continually. Suddenly she exclaimed :

"Somehow you are really putting me in good spirits. That is odd, for I have noticed that people who are happy usually have a depressing effect upon me—force of contrast, I suppose. It's a long time since I was happy. But I'm generally comfortable. Happiness makes one so egotistic that one is insufferable. Now with you it is different. I may say I quite bask in your presence. Do you think you could pardon me if I take my note-book again? Thanks. You see, ideas are so rare with the best of us that when I think I have one I must make haste to get it on paper. I am sure to forget my best things if I don't fasten them directly."

Salome, as her hostess wrote, strolled around the room looking at the pictures and the books. It was Mrs. Darrah's custom to take about with her two or three pictures and a box of books, and little things which her maid was instructed to arrange immediately they had secured rooms at a hotel. She said the average pictures in apartments in the best hotel in the world were enough to drive one frantic ; and as she spent a great deal of time in such places, she could not afford to be driven frantic so often and so continuously.

Now, after writing a few lines, Mrs. Darrah raised her eyes and fixed them upon Salome as she walked slowly, stopping before the pictures. A phrase from a French writer came into the woman's mind :

"Everything is involuntary with her ; that is the secret of her charm."

"Yes," thought Mrs. Darrah, "anything studied may attract, but it is the involuntary that holds one." And she added to herself with some cynicism, "of course, Moore loves her ; and he will always love her, or as long as it is in the male human nature to love one woman."

Salome was standing with her hands clasped behind her before a canvas on the wall; the full radiance of the light was on her figure. Mrs. Darrah's wizened face beamed as it was turned towards her.

"My dear child," she said, "do you ever read Cherbuliez?"

"No," answered Salome; "to tell the truth," hesitatingly, "I don't think I read very much."

"Oh, well, it isn't necessary for you to read—you are living. I was going to quote from Cherbuliez. In looking at you just now I am 'tempted to accompany you on the harp.' Isn't that pretty? Now I understand precisely what he meant by that phrase."

"Oh, Mrs. Darrah!" exclaimed Salome with a laugh. She was putting from her the thought of how this woman had wounded her a few moments ago. It was so easy to put from her everything disagreeable; for did she not love, and was she not beloved?

Salome continued to look at the picture—a bit of upland pasture where some savins grew, and where three crows were flying. There was no cloud in the sky, which was a midsummer sky, the sky of an intensely hot day. This drew Salome and held her.

"The man who painted this," she said, "knew what midsummer is, what heat and brilliant light are. I wish I had something like this to look at in those horrible chilling days when I am left alone."

Mrs. Darrah glanced at the wall.

"That?" she responded, "that isn't a man's work; that is one of Mrs. Bradford's."

Salome turned quickly. She was not much more versed in art than in literature; but she had a natural good taste which might be depended upon in a selection.

"Mrs. Bradford?" she repeated, "why, that must be my Mrs. Bradford!"

Her eyes glowed with pleasure.

"Have you a Mrs. Bradford, then?" asked Mrs. Darrah.

"I didn't know you knew her. I became acquainted with her work two or three years ago, and I liked it. It isn't pretentious; it's true; and it has feeling. There is no work in the world without feeling that is worth a rap. You've heard that there are only two kinds of people, haven't you, Mrs. Moore?"

"No," said Salome, still standing before the picture and gazing at it with even greater interest. "What are the two kinds?"

"The people who kindle and the people who don't"; I'm quoting again. Now Mrs. Bradford is one of those who kindle. I have met her a few times this winter. I'm glad you know her. As one grows older there are fewer and fewer men and women one cares to know. They are mostly bores; and you become a bore yourself, only you can forgive in yourself what you can't forgive in another. I see by your face that you like Mrs. Bradford."

"Oh yes, so much. She wanted me to—"

Here Salome paused, thinking it would seem egotistical to go on. But Mrs. Darrah insisted.

"Don't break off in the middle of a sentence," she exclaimed. "It must be interesting to know what Mrs. Bradford wanted of you."

"She said she wished to paint my portrait," was the answer, given with a little shyness.

"Ah! I like that. I was not mistaken in Mrs. Bradford. She is like me, she knows—she knows."

It did not seem necessary for Mrs. Darrah to explain what she and Mrs. Bradford knew.

Salome was not sure but that she ought to be sorry she had told this. She reflected that even her husband did not yet know it. Their talk upon another topic had been so absorbing that she had not spoken of this, and when their mood had changed at lunch she had decided that there was not time; she did not like to be hurried.

"Has she begun it?" now inquired Mrs. Darrah with great interest.

"Yes, this morning."

"I wish I might see her at work. It is so interesting to see an artist at work. But you will be starving by this time. Let us go down to dinner. I take my dinner with the great herd occasionally. The great herd is depressing, but then it is depressing also to feed alone. In point of fact nearly everything is lowering in some way. I hope you told Mr. Moore to come to fetch you. Yes, that's right. Now he is one of those who don't carry about a lowering temperature with them. He is essentially genial. He is not what you called keyed up to too high a pitch, and he is not stolid."

"Oh no; he isn't stolid," Salome hastened to say; and then she wished that she had not spoken, for Mrs. Darrah smiled at her quizzically.

The two were at the table now. Salome had ceased to be awed by what had first seemed to her the vastness of hotel service, and the strange indifference of everybody to everybody else. She had surrounded herself with her own atmosphere of love and happiness, and was now placidly sorry that there was no one else in the world so happy as she and her husband were. Notwithstanding the suffering of a few hours before, Salome had a conviction that their happiness was absolutely invincible. It must be, she told herself, as she went about day after day, and now as she sat by Mrs. Darrah in the big dining-room, she leaned upon that happiness as upon a stable bulwark; she was always feeling that "impassioned calm," that subtlety of "tranquil passion" which, as some one has said, is the perfection of happiness, and which cannot be known outside of mutual love. That is what Salome believed. As she glanced at the elderly, shrunken woman by her side she wondered if Mrs. Darrah knew this great truth about love. There were so many things to know about love which Salome was sure were not generally known. She was convinced that she had discovered a great many facts bearing upon this subject. Of course, other people had been happy

in a degree ; other people had thought they loved, and doubtless had done so. Nevertheless, it remained true that no two in the world could ever have known the extreme felicity which she and her husband knew, and were to continue to know as the years went by.

Thinking and feeling thus, Salome listened to Mrs. Darrah's talk as she sat beside her and replied gayly. She was watching the passing of the time, for every moment brought nearer the coming of Moore. She could not deny but that in the bottom of her heart there was a grain of anxiety as to his face and manner. Would that talk have left even the slightest cloud ?

When he did appear even this suspicion of anxiety vanished, for Moore came with poorly disguised eagerness after reading his wife's note.

As he allowed himself an instant's glance into Salome's eyes, his spirits bubbled up with joyous effervescence. The past was past, in the future, of course, Salome would gradually be impressed by his influence, and besides there would be no temptation for her to—he hesitated in his thoughts, and finally he ended his sentence with the phrase "to prevaricate." Besides, all women prevaricated. Perhaps it was not in the feminine nature to have any real sense of the truth. That is, it was not a characteristic of the feminine nature.

About that forgery now, it was plain enough that she had no "realizing sense." Yes, indeed, things would come out all right. He had only to love and to be patient. And he felt a boundless capacity both for loving and for patience.

It was when the two were walking homeward in the clear cold of the evening that Salome told her companion of her meeting with Mrs. Bradford, and of the first sitting for the portrait. It seemed to her that they had never been so happy, never so thoroughly in sympathy as now, as they walked under the street-lamps. There was an elation of which Salome was keenly conscious. It would have been impossible that she should not, sometimes, have thought

with dread of the time when Moore would learn all the incidents connected with their marriage. Now he knew, and he still loved her. They were still one.

She hung upon his arm. She talked rapidly of Mrs. Bradford, and of how Mrs. Bradford was the kind of woman she liked. And permission had been given for Moore to visit the studio in the morning, and—

"Ah! there she is now, in that carriage—right here. The woman in the white fur-cloak. She sees me. Randolph, don't you like her smile? Why, she is going to speak to me."

The carriage stopped, and Mrs. Bradford, evidently in opera dress, leaned forward and made a gesture which Salome obeyed, going to the edge of the sidewalk, Moore remaining a pace in the rear.

"I was going to send a message to you, Mrs. Moore," said Mrs. Bradford, "but as I saw you I couldn't resist the wish to stop you. Don't come to-morrow morning; I shall be away; but come the day after."

"Yes," said Salome.

Mrs. Bradford still remained leaning forward, slightly, looking at Salome and smiling as one smiles, involuntarily, at sight of a radiant face. Directly, however, she drew back. The carriage went on. Salome gazed after it an instant, drew a long breath, then looked up at her husband as if for his approval of this woman who had just left them.

"You see I'm quite proud that she wants to paint me," she said.

"I should think you would be," was the response. "As for me, I should be set up entirely out of reach of common mortals if she wanted to paint me. Perhaps mine isn't the kind of beauty that takes her fancy; and perhaps she doesn't paint men."

Moore stroked his beard and laughed. He also was in what he would have called in another "dangerously good spirits." He could not understand it in the least.

Later, when he woke in the night and lay with wide-open

eyes, apparently not thinking of anything, there suddenly sprang at him the words :

“ Oh, I wish she cared for the truth !”

Why should those words have come to him now when he had been so happy a few hours before? And then there rose in his mind a vivid picture of Salome's face as it had been that time when he and she were walking on the Florida sands, and she had told him that he could not respect her. Respect her? He must respect her. He must.

He lay utterly still, his hands clinched, a perspiration coming on his forehead. How was he going to know when she was telling him the truth? How could he expect her to tell him the truth always? And what should he do if he discovered another falsehood? Now and then, as time went on, should he detect her in a lie? He shuddered. Even a man whose life is not upon as high a plane as Moore strove that his should be, could not help a strong repulsion at the thought that his wife was not truthful. Whatever he is himself, a man desires that his wife shall be upright.

It is not when one wakes in the darkness, that one has hopeful views of any trouble or perplexity.

Moore's thoughts ran on in painful confusion until at last he fell asleep again. He was surprised that in the morning he should be able to regard that hour of darkness almost as if it had been a dream. Only as the days went by, there were moments when it seemed as if that hour had left a shadow. But as yet he could easily escape the shadow. It could hardly come when Salome was near him, and he could turn and look in her face.

XIV

PORTRAIT PAINTING

SALOME had been three times to sit for her portrait, but it had happened that her husband had not been able to accompany her until this fourth visit, as he had been called away on business, which had detained him more than a week.

It was never difficult of late for Salome to kill time, even though Moore were away. How could time lag since, wherever he was, Moore's love was hers? She would write at odd moments every day to him, and the writing brought him near. She wrote a thousand nothings, and she unconsciously infused into these nothings so much of herself and her love that Moore, reading these letters hundreds of miles away, felt his heart glow with a happiness that was yet new enough and perfect enough to seem utterly mysterious—to seem, indeed, as if it were a miraculous gift from heaven.

Perfect? Well, since these two were human there must be some flaw. But the young man was thus far able to thrust from him the greater part of the time any remembrance of a flaw. Occasionally he would think that he must bear with Salome's faults, as she would have to bear with his. And when he decided thus, the after-thought would invariably present itself: the deep longing that this failing might have been almost any other failing. He often recalled Mrs. Gerry's assertion that "truth was the foundation of everything."

At such times, as the body writhes in pain, so Moore's soul would writhe. Still he was young and profoundly in love, and he had great faith nearly always in his power to influence Salome.

On the morning of his return his mind was very far from misgivings of any kind. Salome was not expecting him until the evening; she was just starting for Mrs. Bradford's studio, and she only waited for her husband to make himself presentable after his journey, so that he might accompany her. Then the two set forth. The March winds swept fiercely over the Common, and people hurried on with bent heads and red faces. Salome's furs rose high about her neck, and framed her head as in a picture. The clear glow of her eyes was beautiful to see. Looking into those eyes, one would say the owner of them must be an incarnation of truth.

"I've been dreaming and dreaming since you've been away," she was saying as they reached Boylston Street and were a little sheltered from the breeze, "and always the same dream; that is, almost the same. It wasn't a bad dream, only somehow I became so tired of it, and I wanted you to assure me that it didn't mean anything. I had a great mind to tell it to Mrs. Bradford, but I didn't quite dare, and then when she gets that palette on her thumb I'm not really sure that she will hear me if I do say anything."

"Oh, is she like that?" asked Moore, who did not think much of the dream, and who had thought curiously of Mrs. Bradford.

"You need not say 'like that' in such a tone," was the retort. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I hope she is something more than a machine that can paint," said Moore. "Now, do you really suppose," in a confidential tone, "that your artist-woman loves her husband? You see," with a laugh, "that's my test. I shall not approve of her if she is—"

"You just wait," interrupted Salome. "If, when you see her, you think that kind of a woman would marry without love, why, you ask her."

"No doubt I shall ask her," answered Moore, "and no doubt she will confide in me. But here we are."

The two were ushered directly into the little room in

the rear, which was the studio. The artist was alone, and she came forward to greet her visitors. She held Salome's hand a moment longer than was necessary for mere greeting; then her glance was given to the tall figure behind.

"So you have brought him," she said to Salome, "and I have known all along that he will be my most arbitrary critic."

"I wanted Mr. Moore to know you," said Salome, in her happy voice. "He says I've been so vain since you began to paint my portrait that I am quite insufferable."

Moore, glancing at the mistress of the studio as he bowed to her, met her eyes, and instantly felt at his best. His spirits had been high as he had walked along, gayly breasting the buffeting wind with his wife by his side; now they were higher still. He was immediately conscious of a decided gratitude that his wife should know such a woman as this. He did not quite understand why she seemed to him any more than a quiet, well-bred woman, with a refined and extremely suggestive face.

"I'm glad you have come, Mr. Moore," said Mrs. Bradford, with unaffected warmth. "And now you will tell me precisely what you think of this."

As she finished speaking she walked towards the easel. Moore followed, having, as he afterwards said, his own ideas as to what women could do at portrait painting.

His face kindled instantly in a way that invariably made the face of any one looking at him kindle also. Mrs. Bradford was cheered by this look, and her smile grew still more intimate and cordial.

"I had no idea it would be like this," he exclaimed.

Perhaps one reason why people found Moore so likable was that he let his heart speak out when his heart held no bitterness.

Mrs. Bradford flushed with pleasure.

"Like what?" she asked. "I hope it is like Mrs. Moore."

"Yes, yes; it is," he answered.

He glanced swiftly and radiantly at Salome, then back to the canvas.

"When it is done, do you know what I am going to call it?"

As the artist put this question to Moore she took a brush, touched it to her palette, advanced and drew the brush softly along a part of the background.

The portrait was only a head, the bust shading off indefinitely. There were absolutely no adjuncts to distract attention or to modify judgment.

"Call it?" said Moore, absently. He was gazing with his soul in his face at the canvas.

Mrs. Bradford liked him more and more.

"I could imagine that a man or woman in trouble might go to him," she was thinking. "The mere going to him would be a help; the mere being in contact with that courteous, sweet strength."

"Yes," she repeated; "if you will give me a name better than the one I have chosen I will take your name for this."

She gazed at the head contemplatively.

"It is the face of a happy woman," said Moore, in a low voice.

"That is why I shall call it 'Happiness,'" answered Mrs. Bradford.

She turned towards Salome, who was somewhat behind the two.

"Do I really and truly look like that?"

As she put the question, Salome seemed to shrink back still more.

"I don't mean because it's beautiful, you know," she went on, hastily, "for it isn't that. I mean—" she hesitated, then her eyes brightened in a way they had, and which had a still more striking effect because she did not blush. "It is because," still more rapidly, "this face is as if heaven itself might envy the original of it."

As Salome spoke thus, Moore turned towards her with

an impetuous movement, but he instantly restrained himself, and resumed his study of the portrait.

Mrs. Bradford was slightly aloof from the two. She was gazing at Salome, and in her gaze was something of that pathetic prevision which is so frequently awakened by the sight of happiness.

"Mrs. Moore is too often in the superlative degree," now said Moore, glancing at his hostess, and trying to speak deprecatingly.

"And is it only the positive degree that you care for in her?" asked Mrs. Bradford. "It is those who know about the superlative who get loved the most and who love the most."

She spoke as if she were stating a simple fact.

"But do you never think," responded Moore, "of what some one has said, that there's only just so much happiness for every one in this world; and that you are often allowed a choice, as if your life were bread and happiness were butter? You can spread the butter very thin, and have a semblance of delight right along, or you can do just the other way, and have nothing save butterless crusts after a while."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bradford, "I often think of that; but temperament generally forbids freedom of choice."

No one made any reply to this response, and the three stood in silence looking at the canvas. At last the artist said, addressing Moore:

"I want to ask you if you think I have caught what I call the Puritan look of the face? That has been the puzzling thing all the time. I think that is what drew my attention at the very first; that doesn't usually accompany the—well, I will call it the other expression. Mrs. Moore," smiling at Salome, "you must pardon me if I discuss you now as if you were a model. But you see your husband's opinion must be very valuable, and I am more interested in this portrait than in anything I've undertaken for a long time. I can hardly thank you enough for the oppor-

tunity to try to put you on canvas. It's more than painting. It's a study in psychology. Now please don't object to being made a study in psychology."

There was such a warm tone in Mrs. Bradford's voice that Salome could not quite make up her mind to put her objection in words. Nevertheless, she felt that objection. Her pride and pleasure in the portrait were now somewhat mixed with something which she could not well define.

Why did some people think they must study her? And what was there strange in her face? There was Mrs. Darrah with her note-book, and here was Mrs. Bradford with her paint and brushes. She could not understand. Of course, she was often an enigma to herself. She supposed that men and women were always enigmas to themselves; but then others seemed to be able to conceal the fact.

Mrs. Bradford was watching her; she came to her side, and put her hand on Salome's arm.

"Forgive me," she said, "but do you dislike to have me go on with the portrait? I can't help studying you as I paint it. Do you object?"

Moore was still standing in front of the easel and examining the picture. Now he said, remonstrantly:

"Salome, I want this portrait, if I can persuade Mrs. Bradford to let me have it. I beg you won't take up any freak about it. Besides," breaking into a slight laugh, "if you have the face of a Puritan and that of a woman of the tropics all in one, what can you expect but that some one will want to find out your secret?"

"But I have no secret—I have no secret," protested Salome, with more warmth than was quite proper to display before one whom she knew so little as she knew her hostess.

Moore laughed again, but there was nothing irritating in his laugh or in his manner as he turned to his wife.

"You have a secret all the same, though you don't know you have one," he said, "and I'm going to encourage Mrs. Bradford to paint it; and then perhaps I shall be able to understand it myself."

Mrs. Bradford had approached the canvas, and was again touching it here and there with her brush.

"You know," she said now, "there is a great deal of talk about our dual nature. It's all very mysterious. I suppose Mrs. Moore has the dual nature a little more visible than the rest of us."

"And I imagine," said Salome, with some eagerness, "that, as we live on, one of these natures grows stronger, and the other grows weaker. Now I—" here she paused, her face becoming more vivid and her eyes deepening. She was afraid she was getting too egotistic.

"Now you—" repeated Mrs. Bradford in a way that impelled Salome to go on, with her gaze fixed on the woman near her, to whom she seemed to be making a confession. She was drawn by the interest in the elder woman's countenance.

"I was only going to say that I seem to be leaving the Puritan behind me. It seems to be years behind me. I can hardly remember that time when I was continually asking if this or that were right. I don't think about right very often now. I'm just happy, you see. Mrs. Bradford, do you think happiness tends to make one morally weak? But, then, I don't care much whether I'm morally weak or not. Please don't be shocked. But you will not be, I know. To be happy, with me, has something of the effect that a Southern scene has. I only want to live, just to live. Oh, Mrs. Bradford, now you are studying me. You are putting something more in the portrait. You see," to Moore, "I say just what comes to me. Anyway, I seem to be doing that now. But I don't talk in this way every time I come, do I?"

The artist said "No," absently. She was at work.

Moore stepped away and began to examine some of the bronzes and pictures which were here and there about the room.

Salome took the seat it had been her habit to occupy, and the work began in earnest.

Presently Moore left the two women, saying he would return in a couple of hours.

At the best, it finally becomes wearisome to sit still and be looked at. But Mrs. Bradford, after a half-hour of silence, began to talk as she painted.

She did not tell Salome that it was the puritanical expression she now wished to evoke. But she had not studied her subject for several mornings without having arrived at some slight knowledge.

She now began to speak of Salome's mother. She asked if Mrs. Gerry came often to the city.

"Oh no; she has only been here once. Mr. Moore thought I was going to have a fever, and she came right in and stayed until I was better. I go to see her every week. I will never be really separated from my mother."

"I am so interested in her." Mrs. Bradford said these words with so much feeling that Salome's eyes filled. "She is lonesome without you," added Mrs. Bradford.

"Yes."

"Can you not persuade her to come, and to come here with you?"

"Oh, do you mean it?"

"Certainly. I usually mean the thing I say."

"Do you?"

There was something in Salome's voice as she pronounced those two words that made Mrs. Bradford hold her brush suspended in her hand. She gazed at her guest with something more than mere interrogation.

Salome seemed to be going to say something other than what she did say, which was only:

"People are so different about that."

"Yes, I know," was the response. "But I never could endure even the little conventional lies which we hear every day. Though they don't deceive any one."

"I suppose it is considered very wrong to deceive people, even for their own happiness," now said Salome.

She was under the influence of a wish to be frank with

Mrs. Bradford. It was always such a relief to meet any one like her.

"I think it's wrong," was the quiet response.

"Yes, I suppose so. I wonder why it is thought so much more wrong than to break some of the other commandments?"

"Some things are what you might call more fundamental than others, perhaps."

"That must be it," thoughtfully. "Everybody seems to think so. I wonder why?" again.

Mrs. Bradford looked at her.

"You wonder why?" in undisguised surprise.

"Oh," returned Salome, laughing, "I'm only talking to see what I can say, as we used to do when we were children."

Having spoken thus there was silence again. Salome's thoughts were not as pleasant as usual, and Mrs. Bradford immediately discovered this fact. She began to work more slowly and hesitatingly; at last she laid down her brush.

"My inspiration seems to be gone," she said. "I cannot paint you if you are not happy. Something troubles you."

Mrs. Bradford sat down in a chair near her companion. Without speaking she was yet able to make her guest aware of a warm sympathy and interest.

Salome remained for a few moments without speaking, her eyes drooped. At last she looked up.

"Of late I don't very often look into the future," she said; "it is enough to live in the present. But since we have been talking just now I've been thinking—Mrs. Bradford will you think it very strange indeed if I say what is in my mind? You are sure you will not? You know sometimes we can say to a stranger who is kind and in sympathy what we cannot say to one nearer?"

Salome's eyes, with a pleading eagerness in them, were now fixed upon Mrs. Bradford's face—without waiting for any reply she went on :

"I know it's one of the most foolish things in the world, but it just came over me for the first time since my marriage that it's only for a little while I can make my husband happy—don't interrupt me, please. I used to think that way for a long time before we were married, but you see I couldn't hold out, though I thought I was convinced that I ought to hold out. I'm not going to tell you about that; I don't think I could tell any one. But do you know what has come into my mind just now? Ought I to tell you?"

"I think I shall understand," was the reply; "but do as you feel."

"It's a strange thing to say, but the thought clutched me as if it were an unrelenting hand that my husband should have married—oh, don't be shocked!—he should have married a woman like you. Then I could look forward to his future with assurance."

Mrs. Bradford smiled, as she bent forward towards her companion.

"You must be very tired," she said, "or," with another smile, "perhaps you are dyspeptic?"

"No, no, I'm not tired, and I'm perfectly well, and I wish I was another kind of a woman!"

Here Salome covered her face with her hands. She did not sob, however, but sat perfectly still.

Mrs. Bradford hesitated before she said, more lightly than she felt:

"You seem to be the kind of a woman whom Mr. Moore loves."

"Oh yes, I know that," with her face still covered; then suddenly looking up, "but don't you suppose I can somehow become all that you call Puritan? If I could get to be all Puritan I'm sure everything would be right. I don't care, only for mother and Randolph. I think they would like to have me that way."

Mrs. Bradford could only understand in a general manner. But she did understand that the two natures which showed themselves in Mrs. Moore's face must be at odds

with each other, unless one so far predominated as to hold possession almost undisputedly ; and this, she imagined, was the case. She now said that if Mrs. Moore's mother and husband wanted her to be a certain way—but when she had begun the sentence its inadequacy appeared so glaring to her that she did not finish it. But Salome understood her, for she replied, immediately :

"Oh, I can't, I can't. There's something in me that makes me be just myself ; and I have to see things just as I do see them. I could cut off a hand, or shoot myself, at least I think I could, for these two people I love, but I can't have the kind of conscience they have."

Salome rose and went and looked at the portrait. But she did not seem to see it.

"You must think I'm a very strange person to talk like this to you," she said, as if addressing the portrait, "but I felt somehow, all at once, as if I must say what I've said. It came over me, you know, and now I shall not dwell on it at all. I never dwell on unpleasant things nowadays. They drop right off of me." She turned towards Mrs. Bradford. "I shall be happy again, and you may go on painting me to-morrow."

And Mrs. Bradford did go on for some days more, giving herself up to her work in the mornings with an enthusiasm that did not in the least abate.

Salome noticed that the painter often led the talk to Salome's mother. At last, when the portrait seemed to be nearly done, Mrs. Bradford laid down her brushes and mahlstick with something like discouragement.

"What is the matter?" asked Salome. "Is it done? And is it really as happy as ever?"

She left her chair to see if she could decide for herself.

"It's just as happy," she exclaimed, "and somehow I like it better. There's more in it. But then perhaps there's more in it than there is in my face really. Do you think there is? I shouldn't like that."

Mrs. Bradford did not seem in good spirits. She kept

stepping here and there that she might look at her work in different lights.

"Something is the matter with it," she said. "And until I find out what I must not touch it."

Salome tried to discover for herself what these words meant, but she could not. She did not dare to say that she thought another touch would spoil the portrait. But then, she reflected, she could not be a good judge of her own portrait.

It was while they were standing by the easel and Mrs. Bradford was frowning slightly as she looked, that a servant came in with two cards.

Mrs. Bradford took them.

"I forgot they were to come this morning," she said, as if to herself. "Show them here," to the servant.

Salome walked to where her cloak and bonnet lay on a couch. She had just thrown her cloak over her shoulders when the sound of a voice made her pause. Her face grew pale, then resolute.

What she was saying to herself was :

"I think I might have had a little more time before seeing her."

Having thought this, with her bonnet in her hand, she faced about and waited as Mrs. Darrah and her niece entered the studio.

Mrs. Darrah was animated. She went quickly to her hostess, saying that Mrs. Bradford might rely upon it that her kindness in allowing them to come was appreciated.

"I took the liberty to bring my niece, Miss Nunally, Mrs. Bradford. I hope it was not too much of a liberty. But she knows a great deal about art. Indeed, there are a good many things that she knows about, as you will soon discover. Portia, make your bow to Mrs. Bradford."

Portia came forward in her most pleasing way. She responded modestly to the greeting given to her. Then she walked to the easel and stood before it in silence. She was joined by her aunt, who said it was particularly this she had

come to see. She knew the moment she saw Mrs. Moore this season that Mrs. Bradford was the only artist, man or woman, who could do this portrait.

"Mrs. Moore is here," said Mrs. Bradford.

Portia had known this from the instant of her entering. She had seen Salome, and only Salome, it seemed to her, though the latter had stood withdrawn and half screened by a huge torso.

"Oh, is she?"

Mrs. Darrah turned about quickly, scenting some dramatic scene and anxious to take it in fully.

But there was no scene at all. Salome advanced immediately and shook hands with the new-comers. She asked Portia if she had just left Florida—and was it not early in the season to come away from the South? As for her, she thought the spring winds here in Boston very trying.

Yes, Portia had arrived only the night before. The friends with whom she had been staying had suddenly resolved to come home.

"And of course I could not remain, a poor unchaperoned thing, down there in a hotel"—finishing her explanation thus, the girl laughed. Then she turned away, glanced again at the portrait, and remarked in an agreeable and superficial voice that one whom Mrs. Bradford consented to paint ought to feel flattered. In a moment she resumed:

"We stopped over a day in New York, and I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Moore. Odd, wasn't it? We happened to be in at Delmonico's for lunch, and he walked up to our table. I congratulated him that his uncle had died without changing his will. Even in a marriage for love it is not unpleasant to have plenty of money. And then if you have an uncle who has money, it is nice to have him die when he can do the most good by dying. Uncles are not often sufficiently thoughtful about dying in time." And Portia strolled off down the room to look at sketches and pictures.

After having listened to a few words from Mrs. Darrah, Salome hastened out into the street. She was thinking that Portia looked much older, that her face had hardened in some way; still, the subtle something that made Portia at will a fascinating woman remained.

When Mrs. Darrah and her niece left the studio and entered the carriage in waiting for them Portia began to talk immediately of the artist. She talked so persistently of her and her work that Mrs. Darrah exclaimed :

"Portia, I wish you wouldn't chatter so! You make my head spin; and I'm trying to describe that portrait for my next chapter."

"Are you still using Salome?" asked the girl. Then she shrugged her shoulders. "How disgusting it is to see any one as happy as she is! But there's something the matter with the portrait. It has too much conscience in it now—it is more like what Salome was in Florida at the very first, when you know she was just a conscience walking about in incipient phthisis. She recovered from her conscience sooner even than she did from her phthisis. She hasn't much of it left now. Oh, how happy she looks!" Here the speaker but half repressed a shudder. "If I had a paint-brush in my hand and knew how to use it, I would make that a portrait of a kind of odalisque and have done with it. It's a New England face, but it isn't a New England spirit. How is one going to manage such a subject as that?"

"I thought Mrs. Bradford's success quite phenomenal," remarked Mrs. Darrah.

"So it is. But you see she is dissatisfied with her work. She will change it. I should like to see what she does with it."

It was so true that the artist was dissatisfied that she could not get the portrait out of her mind. While Salome had been talking this last time there had been that in her face which made Mrs. Bradford put in a few touches which altered the expression. Now, left alone with the picture,

the maker of it walked restlessly here and there, trying to get to a point from which she could view it with some satisfaction. It now seemed to her simply a New England face, spiritual, and with a hint of ardor in it. She had seen such faces before. But she knew very well that she had never seen a face like Salome's before.

She almost resolved not to touch it for some days ; but the next day she was before it again, and the next, although Salome was not to have another sitting until the following week.

As she stood studying absorbedly, she would make a touch here and there, then draw back to note the effect. At last the cloud of doubt and bewilderment left her mind. She laid down her brushes and pressed her hands together.

"That is really it," she exclaimed with exultation.

While she was thus contemplating her work a servant came and said that a person who expected to meet Mrs. Moore was in the reception-room. Should he show her to the studio ?

Anybody connected with Mrs. Moore was interesting to Mrs. Bradford, so she said yes, and presently a middle-aged woman appeared under the portière which the servant held aside.

This woman was dressed in black of the best material, but with no "style" whatever in her appearance. She hesitated, not in confusion, however.

"I thought I should find my daughter here," she said.

Mrs. Bradford hastened forward, her face lighting. She held out her hand.

"I knew you were her mother," she responded, with some eagerness. "I am so glad to see you."

Mrs. Gerry's controlled countenance gave way somewhat. She said to herself, "I wish this woman was Salome's friend."

An arm-chair was pulled forward and the guest was seated in it.

"My daughter asked me to meet her here at this time," she said. "She wanted me to see the portrait."

"Yes, yes," replied Mrs. Bradford, still more eagerly than she usually spoke. "I have so much wished you would come." She stooped, gently took Mrs. Gerry's hand, and led her in front of the easel. As she stood there with her she retained the hand in a warm clasp.

The mother's eyes gave one long look at the painted face, then they turned away. They seemed to be seeking some object upon which they could rest. But they came back again. She made an effort, and stood more erectly, as if thus the better to endure something.

After a moment she said that she believed she would sit down; she found that she was tired. She wasn't used to being round in a city, and she became more tired than if she were at home and at work.

Mrs. Bradford drew the chair yet nearer, and sat down by her companion.

Presently Mrs. Gerry seemed to think that she must speak.

"Of course," she said, "you never could have seen his likeness; I don't think he ever had any likeness, either."

"I don't know what you mean," was the response.

"I hope you'll excuse me," returned Mrs. Gerry, carefully. "But I was so surprised when I looked at your painting of my daughter."

"Isn't it like her, then?"

Mrs. Gerry now fixed her eyes on her companion as if in restrained but still intense examination. Then she seemed to relax through her whole frame.

"Like her?" she said in a whisper. "It is a picture of her soul. But how strange it is to talk like this! I hope you will forgive me. She has never resembled my grandfather in the least in looks, but there she does resemble him—there she might be his own child. How did you find her out? What shall I do if she is not happy? And how can she be happy for long? But if we will only do right, it is not necessary to be happy."

Here Mrs. Gerry stopped suddenly and made an attempt to resume her ordinary manner. She had been greatly startled, but even then she would not have yielded to her surprise if there had not been something in Mrs. Bradford's manner which made her feel as if there were no need of concealment with her. In a moment she asked :

“ Has Mr. Moore seen this ?”

“ Not as it is now,” was the reply.

XV

IN THE STUDIO

MRS. GERRY remained silent before the easel. She appeared to be looking at the picture resolutely. But she knew that it would be difficult to withdraw her eyes from it. She was afraid. Into her strong nature had penetrated a strange fear of which she could not yet divest herself. It seemed to her like a miracle that a stranger had been able to dive into her daughter's nature, and then to put that nature upon canvas.

Mrs. Bradford must be possessed of wonderful gifts. What Mrs. Gerry would have hidden from all the world this woman's mind had openly displayed. But what a drawing, holding power the picture had! How innocent it looked! And yet there was a hint of possibilities in it. Mrs. Gerry had an impulse to shield Salome from something which the portrait suggested.

"I am very sorry this has been done," she said, with an earnestness that had something of austerity in it.

"You must blame me," Mrs. Bradford hastened to say. "I asked permission, and Mrs. Moore was so kind as to grant it. I wish you would not feel badly about it. You see the child looked so happy; it was so lovely to meet such a person! Do you think I did wrong?" and the speaker could not help adding, "and do you really think I have succeeded?"

"Succeeded? Oh yes. I wish you had not. I wish you had not thought of this thing. I—I can't get over it."

Mrs. Gerry, with marked decision of manner, walked away from the easel, and sat down with her back to it. She fold-

ed her hands in her lap, and looked straight ahead of her. She was already thinking that she had said too much—that she had displayed too much feeling.

Her hostess remained for a moment by the picture, but she glanced at her guest sitting there. Mrs. Bradford was asking herself why she was so unusually interested. Perhaps it was partly because her own girlhood was strongly recalled by something in Mrs. Gerry's aspect and manner. The low-ceiled rooms, the fields, the hills, the sky, the dear desolation of the country in fall and winter, all came back to the artist's memory with a distinctness which made her heart beat more swiftly.

She was not given to too much demonstration, but just now she was tempted to go to Mrs. Gerry, to kneel by her side and put her arms about her. She was dimly aware that there must be something stirring and dramatic in the history of that girl whose portrait she had just painted. She wondered if she should ever know that history. It did not appear, however, that Mrs. Moore knew much of the world, or had passed through many different experiences; there was a touching freshness in the face and the outlook of that face.

What was it?

Impelled by an increasing interest, Mrs. Bradford, rather wondering at herself, crossed the floor to Mrs. Gerry's side and placed her hand on the woman's shoulder.

"Don't be so troubled!" she said, softly.

Mrs. Gerry looked up quickly. The sympathy and the trustworthiness in the face bending down to her seemed to weaken her, as one appears to weaken when a tension is relaxed. But she tried instantly to brace herself again.

"I guess, perhaps, I'm one that borrows trouble," she said. "I don't know why I should feel like talking some to you, when you are a stranger. I haven't been quite well for a week or two, and I've slept poorly and dreamed so much. That's why I decided to come in and see Salome.

I began to worry about her more than common. But this must be very uninteresting to you."

Mrs. Gerry opened a little bag she carried, drew her handkerchief from it, and wiped her lips carefully, keeping the handkerchief in its fold.

"On the contrary," responded Mrs. Bradford, emphatically, "it is very interesting to me. And don't you know one is often tempted to speak freely to a stranger who is in sympathy?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gerry, looking up, "that must be so."

She said nothing more, though her companion waited expectantly for a moment. Then Mrs. Bradford spoke again:

"I cannot imagine why you should worry about your daughter, unless it be that too much happiness always makes one anxious."

Mrs. Gerry put her hands, in their black kid gloves, over the little bag. There was some wistfulness in her eyes as she raised them.

"I don't know what it is," she said, going back to a former thought, "that makes me want to talk with you. I don't have anybody to talk to, anyway. I never thought I was one of the kind that confided much in folks."

A sudden pang came to the heart of the younger woman. She could not speak immediately. But in a moment she said:

"Do you care to have me tell you that I am sure it is safe, as safe as for you to tell yourself, to talk to me, if you feel to do so?"

She was conscious of a certain electric stir in the mental atmosphere that surrounded them. The other did not speak for a time, and Mrs. Bradford kept silence. She drew a chair near and sat down. She had a wish to be close to her guest. Curiously, the years between her own life in the country and the present time seemed to roll away, leaving her a girl at the farm-house, with her heart full of eager, unformed ambitions and enthusiasms.

"I want to ask you," now said Mrs. Gerry, "if my daughter has talked much of herself to you. She is rather strange about that; sometimes she is so frank that she frightens me. She doesn't see things as I do. I've been afraid that I didn't bring her up right. Has she talked much to you—about herself, I mean?"

"No."

The mother was visibly relieved.

"She has—well, she has peculiar ideas," she said, after a little silence. Then, with some abruptness, "Mrs. Bradford, how much do you believe in heredity?"

The other did not reply immediately. She hardly knew what to say. She saw that the subject was of intense interest to her companion. At last she answered, rather unsatisfactorily, that she believed a great deal in it.

"But, of course," said Mrs. Gerry, quickly, "I suppose you don't think anything short of insanity can take away our responsibility? We are put here to choose, you know. We choose just as we please; and we have to suffer the consequences. One choice often changes our lives, puts us in another road, you know. I hope you'll excuse me, but I've thought and thought until sometimes it almost seems as if I couldn't think any more. Only I keep right on."

"You ought not to be so much alone," was the response. And then Mrs. Bradford continued rather hurriedly, "You are worried because your daughter inherits something you don't like from some ancestor of whom you do not approve. Yes, I understand. And you think if you had brought her up right you might have eradicated some tendencies. Now I'm sure you brought her up right, so far as faith and honor and integrity are concerned. I'm sure of it. But she has some strain of—of, what shall I call it?—the tropics, the laxness which goes with that strain sometimes. You couldn't eradicate that, and you don't understand that any more than you understand Greek. But there it is. And it's mixed up with the New England part of her nature. And, you see,

I'm frank—I think the Southern warmth and glow, and may I say conscienceless part of her, are fast getting the supremacy.

"Don't think she has talked to me, but I have watched her face with an interest so keen that I cannot describe it to you. If you sometimes painted portraits, Mrs. Gerry, you would know how much may be learned from the study of a face. And let me tell you that I cannot imagine how any one can be with your daughter without loving her. She has, in a phenomenal degree, that utterly mysterious something which wins love. It is something that is not dependent upon character, and which nobody has yet been able to analyze. People put names to the quality, but the names amount to nothing.

"Am I giving you quite a lecture, Mrs. Gerry? Pardon me, then. I don't think I can make you know what a hold Mrs. Moore has obtained over my heart and my imagination. I don't know what it is; she seizes you, she appeals to you. She makes you think of her continually."

As Mrs. Bradford spoke thus, with an increasing warmth, Mrs. Gerry leaned towards her as if drawn by the intensity of her feeling.

But when the speaker ceased the elder woman, instead of yielding to that feeling, drew herself up and away. She brought her pale face into greater control. She was always fearing that she would not have herself entirely in hand.

"I know I think of her continually," she said, "but then," with a smile, "I'm her mother. I suppose I ought not to feel so hurt that you've found out that Salome isn't one who hasn't much conscience. But it does hurt me. It keeps hurting me."

She was not appealing in the least for sympathy. She was stating a fact, and stating it in a way so that it should be plain. She had never before talked just like this to any human being. She had said a few words to her minis-

ter on that night when Salome was married. Now she was already beginning to fear that she had yielded to a weakness. It was surely a weakness not to keep troubles to yourself. Some people were always talking about their troubles. One became very weary of such people. Perhaps Mrs. Bradford, who seemed so kind, was weary of her now.

"Salome has told you of no events in her life?" she asked, suddenly.

"No."

Mrs. Gerry rose. She was thinking that she had been weak and foolish to come to Boston because of dreams. It must be that she was really losing something of her self-control.

"I'm afraid Salome is detained somewhere," she remarked, "and I'm keeping you. You have been very good."

"You are not keeping me against my will," was the reply. "I'm so interested, Mrs. Gerry. You are not going? Please stay until your daughter comes."

Mrs. Gerry stood hesitating. "I don't know as I ought," she responded. "I'm glad I've seen you, Mrs. Bradford. It's done me good. I'm trying not to worry."

The speaker gazed about the room. She avoided looking at the easel. But at last she said, deprecatingly, that she must be getting childish if she couldn't look calmly at some colors put on canvas.

Having spoken thus she advanced to a place in front of the portrait and stood absorbed before it.

"It hasn't got my grandfather's features, and it hasn't got his color," she said, "but it has his very look—his very look. There's no Ware and no Gerry in it."

"Was your grandfather a bad man?"

Mrs. Bradford ventured to put this question.

"He hadn't any principle," replied Mrs. Gerry. "He never did anything just because it was right. He didn't care for right. He only cared to love and to be loved, and to have the weather warm and sunny."

"People loved him?"

"Oh yes. You had to love him. You couldn't reason at all about it; you had to love him."

Mrs. Bradford smiled.

"We don't reason much as to love," she said.

"No; but it is a good thing when reason approves of a love."

Mrs. Gerry spoke with more emphasis than usual. Soon she turned to her companion.

"Salome tells me that you know Mrs. Darrah and Miss Nunally."

This seemed to the woman addressed to be an irrelevant remark, and she wondered at it.

"I have met them," she answered. She thought that her companion looked at her with some wistfulness, but she could not help her any.

"Have you talked with them much?"

"Oh no," in great surprise. "I have had no opportunity."

"But you will have, you certainly will have."

Here Mrs. Gerry's perplexity was so plainly evident that Mrs. Bradford suddenly took her hand and held it closely.

"Does it annoy you that I may see those people?" she asked.

"I can't help things. I can't help things," said Mrs. Gerry, "and what I can't help I ought to leave; I must just leave it all." She fixed her eyes on Mrs. Bradford's face. "But I do wish that when you come to hear Mrs. Darrah—I don't know what she will say—but when you come to hear her—won't you judge as kindly as you can? It's so strange, but I care a great deal that you should judge kindly. And since you have been able to find out some of my child's tendencies and to put them in her portrait, perhaps you will consider all these things—"

Mrs. Gerry stopped abruptly.

There was a sound at the door, and Salome entered.

She came forward quickly, her presence shedding a kind

of glow in the studio. She gave her hand to Mrs. Bradford, then she said that she hoped her mother had not given her up, but that she had met Miss Nunally at Chandler's, and Miss Nunally had insisted upon having help in selecting some kind of a spring wrap.

"As if I could help a woman like her!" concluded Salome, with a laugh. "And what does mother think of the portrait? Why"—her face changing—"is there anything wrong?"

"No, no," Mrs. Bradford hastened to say, "nothing. But your mother and I have had a little talk, and she owns that she is sorry I undertook to paint your portrait."

"What? Doesn't she think it's a likeness?" in surprise.

"The likeness is too good," said Mrs. Gerry. "And now if you are ready, Salome, we will go. If your husband wants the portrait I've nothing to say. I guess I must be kind of old-fashioned, but somehow I don't quite approve of having your real self put like that for anybody to look at."

Mrs. Gerry shook hands in a formal manner with Mrs. Bradford, and in answer to that lady's remark that she would like to call upon her before she left town, she replied that she had made up her mind to go out home that night.

"I hope I haven't said anything out of the way," she added, "and I'm very glad I've seen you, Mrs. Bradford. You'll think it's foolish, but I feel better some way. Only," scrupulously, "I don't think it's a good plan to paint such a portrait as that."

Then mother and daughter went into the street and walked along almost in silence to the hotel.

Mrs. Gerry took her few belongings. She refused to allow her daughter to order a carriage. She said there was no need of such expense. They went in a trolley car to a corner near the station. Mrs. Gerry was always afraid in a trolley car, but she never mentioned that fear to any one.

She was keenly aware of her ignorance concerning all that pertained to the motive power of these vehicles, and she was deeply thankful when she was on the sidewalk again.

But the moment of parting with her daughter was one of anguish to her. She could not reason herself out of this suffering, try as she would. It was always so when she left Salome. She had to undergo that wrenching of the heart. For years she had tried to school herself against this, and all her endeavors had been fruitless. She often wondered at this and at her entire lack of success. She argued that she ought to be able to do what was reasonable. It was reasonable to feel only a moderate sorrow at leaving Salome, who was coming to her in a few days.

But there was nothing moderate in this longing to take the child in her arms and hold her fast.

"I wish 'twas so you saw a good deal of Mrs. Bradford," said Mrs. Gerry, as the two stood waiting for the gate to open that the passengers might take their places in the train.

"So do I," was the answer.

Then Salome put her hand down and found her mother's hand, which was hanging by her side.

"Are you worrying, mother?" in a tremulous voice. "You needn't. I'm happy. You've no idea how good Randolph is!"

Mrs. Gerry smiled.

"I know that; I'm not worrying about Randolph's not being good."

"It's about me, then? But you needn't. There goes the gate. I want to see you seated."

Salome lingered, standing in the aisle by her mother. She bent over her and assured her again that there was nothing to worry about.

"You ought to be content, since I'm so happy," she repeated. "But I shall be happier when it is warm weather, and I am out in the country all the time with you."

"Salome," said Mrs. Gerry, "you think too much of happiness."

"Oh no," was the answer, with assurance; "I'm right about some things, mother. Let us think of the long, hot summer days which are coming, and that then we shall be together. And in the fall we shall go South. I like to dream about that."

"Don't stay here any longer," said the elder woman, anxiously; "you'll get carried off."

People were hurrying in. Salome kissed her mother. She left the car and stood outside by the window, looking up at her until the train started. Mrs. Gerry gazed at the slender figure with the radiant face until she could see it no longer. Then she sat upright, pressed her lips closely together, and maintained her position until she left the car at her own station.

She was walking towards the public carriage which met this train to take passengers into her neighborhood, when some one close to her said:

"Good-evening, Mrs. Gerry, are you going home?"

It was Walter Redd.

"Is that you, Walter? Yes, I'm going right home."

"Do let me take you, then; my horse and buggy are right here."

Mrs. Gerry would rather have gone by herself, but presently she was sitting beside Redd in the buggy.

"I s'pose you've been to see Salome?" he remarked, after a few moments of silence.

Redd never voluntarily spoke of Salome to any one save her mother.

"Yes, I got worried somehow, and I couldn't wait till the time for her to come out."

Mrs. Gerry was more outspoken with Walter than with any one whom she saw among her neighbors.

"I hope she's well," stiffly.

"Oh yes; and happy, Walter." Here a little hesitation. "I'm sure we ought to be thankful that she's so happy."

"I know it. If it 'll only last. But if it depends on Moore—"

Redd did not finish his sentence. He had never forgiven Moore for what he believed was his desertion of Salome in Florida.

"Walter, you judge Moore all wrong. I can't explain, but you do."

"You needn't try to blind me about that fellow," he replied, with a kind of cold savageness. "I was taken in by him at first, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes a second time. I know what he's done. Didn't he leave Salome? Then didn't he get engaged to that other girl? Then didn't he come back here and jilt the other girl, and so marry Salome out of hand? It beats me that you can stand up for him."

"You don't understand," said Mrs. Gerry.

"No, that's a fact, I don't understand. But one thing I'm mighty sure of, and that is that the time 'll come when she'll see that man as he really is. He's got something about him that makes folks like him, I know that very well. But I'm not going to talk of him any more to-night. I don't know when I've mentioned him before."

When he helped Mrs. Gerry from the carriage in front of the dark little house on the ledge where she still lived, he stood by his horse instead of entering the buggy immediately.

"Mrs. Gerry," he said. Then he stopped. She waited beside him. "Mrs. Gerry, I want you to think as well of me as you can. I'd rather you'd think well of me than any other woman I know, except one. Some way I ain't myself any more. I don't care for anything, really—I didn't know I was so weak."

"Do try to overcome this."

Mrs. Gerry looked at the tall, strong figure beside her. She repeated her words with an almost tender emphasis.

"You needn't think I'm whining round to other people," he exclaimed, with some fierceness. "And I know you

mean well when you tell me to overcome it. Only I can't do it."

"Yes, you can ; but it will take time."

"It 'll take all my life. Is she coming out here for the summer?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll clear out. I won't run the risk of meeting her. That's more than I could endure."

"But your farm, Walter—"

"Oh, I'll let that ; I'll do something. Well, good-night."

He put his foot on the step. Then he turned back.

"Shake hands with me, Mrs. Gerry. I'm always ever so much better for seeing you. You brace me up. Good-night."

He wrung the woman's hand. He jumped into the carriage and drove away.

Mrs. Gerry went into the empty house. She fumbled through the kitchen to the shelf where the lamps stood and lighted one. Then she sat down and looked around the solitary room.

"It's no use trying to find out why things are so," she was thinking. "And it isn't necessary for us to know, either. We can just live along, one day at a time ; and have faith in Him—have faith in Him."

Her face relaxed from its setness as she repeated that phrase, for the phrase meant something to her.

She had taken off her gloves and was slowly smoothing them as they lay on her knee. She was glad she had come home to-night. She could not stay at the hotel with Salome ; and the child was so happy she did not need her. If she had needed her—here the woman's face melted still more.

"Salome is living her life now," she was thinking. "I've lived mine. I'm getting old. I'm not for myself any more. I'm just Salome's mother now. And the child loves me so much. That's the sweetness there is left for me. There never was a child in the world that made love so sweet, never."

Suddenly Mrs. Gerry put her hands over her face ; there were tears in her eyes.

She had not taken off her bonnet nor her cloak. The fire had long since gone out and the house was cold.

Presently she began to feel the chill.

She rose and quickly put on her everyday clothes. She hurried and made a fire. In half an hour she was sitting at the little round table where she and Salome used to sit together. She was drinking some tea and eating a piece of toasted bread. She was thinking that if Salome ever kept house she should probably live with her ; but she was sure that she was too old to try to learn to live in hotels.

Perhaps the tea and the warmth cheered her. When she rose to wash her plate and cup and saucer she was looking forward to the Saturday when Salome would be with her for two days ; and she was reproving herself for those tears. She dared not think much about the tears, however, for she might find it impossible to keep more from coming.

In Boston, Salome had hurried away from the station, going up the street with that carriage which is so aptly described as "walking upon air."

If she had thought of the matter she would have thought that she really did not need the support of the earth for her feet. She could have flown easily enough—only it was not the custom to fly.

She was somewhat sad, as in her mind she went with her mother into the country and arrived at the cottage where no one awaited her. But this sadness was only sufficient to bring into greater relief the abounding joy in her heart. And on Saturday she should be with her mother again. She and Randolph. She wished that she could persuade her mother to live with her all the time ; but since she could not—

She walked on, finding a delightful exhilaration in mere movement. She had known that she could be very happy, but she had not, after all, imagined anything at once so subtle and so sufficient.

Randolph had gone to New York, but he would be back before dinner. If she hurried she could reach the Albany station in time to meet him.

She went on still faster. The train was just coming in. She stood at the entrance, where she could see the stream of people that began to pour along from the cars. She waited eagerly, but standing perfectly still, her furs held closely about her against the keen wind that rushed through the place. She did not notice how nearly every one gave her a glance of interest—a kind of light glance, as of pleasure in the sight of her.

There he was. She made a step forward, then restrained herself, for Moore was not alone. A man with a serious, incisive sort of a face was beside him and talking with him.

Salome knew immediately that it was Dr. Jennings, the surgeon whom the country physician had summoned when Moore had been injured. She had not seen him since that time, and that time now seemed years ago to her, there had been so much happiness crowded into the months since.

Moore was not expecting to see his wife at the station, and now, as she looked again at the surgeon, she shrank from meeting him. She had been conscious of a certain hostility, not in his bearing, but in himself. She had not liked the way his eyes had probed her, as if the glance had been one of his keenest instruments. Now she was aware of a distinct distrust, and of a distinct wish that Randolph should not know that man. But at the same time she knew that these feelings were silly, and she made an effort to stifle them. She could not quite resolve to turn away and not meet her husband, though he was not alone. While she was trying to resolve to do so Moore saw her, his face grew radiant, and he lifted his hat.

"There's my wife now," he said, quickly, to his companion. "Come, let me present you."

"Where?" asked Dr. Jennings. "Do you mean that lady who is smiling at you?"

"Yes; of course. Come!"

"But did you marry her?" inquired the surgeon, in a surprise he did not try to conceal, and with a stress on the final pronoun.

Moore turned towards him. There was a little haughtiness in his manner as he said :

"Certainly ; I married Miss Gerry."

"Do pardon me," the other rejoined, hastily. "But I lost all track of you, though you were such an interesting 'case.' You see I went abroad very soon, and have only returned a week ago. It will give me a great deal of pleasure to be presented to Mrs. Moore."

The two men approached Salome, who had remained standing in the same place.

She was slightly more pale than usual when Dr. Jennings made his bow to her, and there was something like resentment in her heart when she met his gaze, which was coldly questioning.

But his manner was suave enough as he stood a few moments talking commonplaces.

When he had left them neither Salome nor Moore spoke directly. They walked out into the street in the direction of their hotel. The gladness in the woman's heart was chilled, and she was trying to recover the warmth and joy with which she had started out.

As for Moore, he looked down inquiringly at the face near him. He was groping after some solution of this sudden discomfort. He was conscious also of a suspicion of impatience. He was so happy to be back again that he could not bear to come into any cloud.

It was he who spoke first.

"Odd, wasn't it," he said, "that I should happen to run upon that fellow?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but I don't know how you could know him."

"Oh, as to that, I didn't know him. How should I? It was at Springfield that he came into my car. He had a chair just across the aisle from me. I didn't notice him at

first. I thought he was reading, and I was reading too. All at once I became conscious that somebody was staring at me. I had a sort of uneasy feeling as one will have when some one is fixedly gazing at one. Why, Salome, am I paining you in any way?"

"No, no; go on. But Dr. Jennings doesn't strike me as a man with a human heart; he is just a piece of mechanism, with the unerring skill of mechanism, I suppose."

"Well, I don't know about his heart; he has mind enough, anyway. His mind is as sharp as a knife," said Moore. "I wondered why he found me so interesting. I tried to keep on reading, but I couldn't do it. Still I did manage to continue to appear to keep on. After a few moments I heard him say, 'I beg your pardon. But were you injured on the head some months ago, in the country?' At that I was interested enough, you may believe. Salome"—suddenly stopping in his narrative and looking down tenderly at the woman on his arm—"you must not have any more feeling as regards that time. Really I forbid it; I won't stand it. You are my wife now. Won't that content you? It ought. Let the past get itself buried any way it can. You are mine now. If you were not, I should be the most miserable creature in the world."

"You really think so?" with a somewhat tremulous smile.

"I know it. And what is more, you can't help knowing that I know it. Don't you think you are a very exacting person, Mrs. Moore?"

"Yes; I'm sure of it. And I'm not going to keep this up. But, Randolph, I do want to be a blessing to you—you just thought I was a blessing to you, didn't you?" looking up at him.

"I think I intimated as much."

"Very well. Now go on with your little story. What did that horrible doctor say to you?"

"Perhaps he is horrible; I'll own that there seems something a trifle uncanny about him. I acknowledged to him that I did get a hard blow. Yes, he said, he knew me di-

rectly, and he was interested to ask how I came out, and all that. I told him I came out all right; and would he kindly tell me who he was? He said his name was Jennings. Then I knew that he must be the man who dealt with my skull that time. I tried to express my gratitude to him, but he said there was no occasion, that it was all in the way of business; and he had been greatly interested in my case. He called it a very striking instance of—well, I'll think of the word in a minute. It's a word I never heard before, and I wouldn't care to remember it only it was applied to my own skull, you see, so that makes it seem important."

Moore laughed in such a happy and infectious way that Salome joined him. His healthy, wholesome nature, his warmth of temperament, his love for her seemed now to Salome more dear than ever. She could hear him relate the remainder of his interview with that surgeon without any of that uncomfortable emotion which she had just experienced. Besides, perhaps it was best for her to be able to hear that time mentioned, and to speak of it.

"What else did he say?" she asked.

"Not much. He asked me if I was married."

"I'm sure he thought you married Miss Nunally," said Salome.

"What makes you think that?" inquired Moore, quickly.

"I don't know, exactly. Only he was greatly surprised when he saw me. He had expected to see some one else."

"Oh, how sharp women are!" exclaimed Moore.

XVI

REFORMATION?

"You ought to be thankful that we are sharp," remarked Salome, now in high spirits, "since men are so dull." Then, with more earnestness, "Even you have been so dull that you haven't noticed that I'm turning over a new leaf. It's so humiliating for a human being to be mere driftwood in the current of natural proclivities."

Moore glanced seriously down at his companion. He had never heard her speak like that before. He said nothing, and she went on now with something like solemnity:

"I have an idea that words take away from action, somehow; don't you think that they do? When you have talked a great deal about doing a thing, you have a sort of comfortable feeling as if you had done it."

She was not a woman much given to making resolutions—at least, not since she had outgrown the morbid physical conditions of her girlhood.

She could not tell why the sight of that surgeon had in some way stung her with a new wish to control her own being. A good resolution always carries a certain comforting power like a step in the right direction. But it was not alone the meeting with Dr. Jennings.

It was a look which she surprised upon her husband's face. He did not know that she saw it. Perhaps it had all the greater effect because of that fact.

It was after he had been talking to her about truth. He had left her. A few moments later she had gone down to the public parlor for a book she had been reading there.

She was startled to see Moore near the fireplace. There happened to be no one else in the room. Her foot-fall had made no sound on the carpet. She remained motionless, gazing at him. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, his head somewhat bent, in an attitude very unusual with him.

Salome's heart contracted with a feeling different from any she had ever known. She knew her husband was thinking of her, painfully, bitterly, with discouragement.

She did not enter the room. She went silently up the stairs again and sat down at a window of her own chamber. She should see Randolph when he went out. In a short time she saw him walking down the street. He moved as one preoccupied. She kept her eyes upon him as long as he was in sight. Then she rose from her place and walked about aimlessly for a moment. Her face now was more like the face of that girl who had been sent South for health.

She held her hands tightly pressed together.

Suddenly she stopped in her walk and knelt down in front of a chair, pressing her face into a velvet cushion.

She was quiet so long that one might have thought that she had fallen asleep.

When she did rise she walked to a table and took up a Bible lying there. She turned its leaves slowly, but she did not appear to be reading—in fact, she did not read a word. The mere sense that she was holding the Bible from which her mother read every day, and in which she used to read faithfully—this mere sense was all that she required just now. It took her back.

At last her lips moved.

"I don't see why I—myself—don't care. Why don't I, of myself, have the wish to speak the truth? What is it that they call being upright, anyway? Does it make any difference? Some people seem to think so much of it. Yes, and some people think so much of music, or of dress, or of this thing or that. There's Portia Nunally; she tells lies

sometimes, I'm sure. And she was able to think of marrying that Major Root. She was going to sell herself. Isn't she as bad as I am? What is it about me that makes my mother and Randolph so worried?"

She stopped in her talk to herself and looked about her distressfully.

"Surely I love him well enough," she exclaimed, "to be anything he wants me to be. I'm going to tell the truth about everything, even the slightest little thing. I'm going to do it for him—just as I would learn to play the tambourine or anything else. I didn't know but that he might get over feeling this way; and I didn't know but that I might get over feeling my way, and get to caring for the truth.

"Perhaps it would be a good plan to pray in regard to this. Somehow it doesn't seem necessary to pray when you are happy. God appears to be taking care of you then without any interference. But I shall pray."

She went back to the chair and knelt down again. She clasped her hands before her as she had formerly done when she had prayed morning and night. She made her petition aloud; it was more real to her, for that was the way she had done in the old farm-house, when prayer had been so much to her.

To her great surprise her mood instantly became fervidly and reverently beseeching. She had of late only put up frequent and almost involuntary prayers for her husband. She might be said to be praying for him all the time.

Her asking of God now was simple in the extreme. Any one listening to her without seeing her would have said he was hearing a devout child.

"O Lord," she said, "you must help me to tell the truth. You must make a lie odious to me, for a lie is odious to my husband and my mother. They want me to be truthful. And since I can't seem to care anything about it myself, I've made up my mind that I'm going to be truthful just to please them. Lord, I wish you would forgive me because the motive isn't right, but I can't help it—I can't help it; so I'm

just going to be good to please them. Lord, be kind to me, and don't let me make my husband unhappy. I love him so! I love him so!"

She did not say "Amen." Her voice merely stopped. Perhaps it was because of the very simplicity of the words that her petition sounded so pathetic. It was like a heart unconsciously giving utterance to itself.

She remained quiet for some time after her voice ceased to be heard in the room. At last she rose. She tried to settle down to some work, and she finally succeeded. That day made a mark upon her. She began to reckon things in her mind from that day. Often when she was with her husband she would turn and gaze at him searchingly but furtively. She was fearing to see upon his face that expression which she had surprised upon it in the hotel parlor. But if that look should come there she wished to know it.

Once, as the two sat together of an evening, Moore glanced up from his paper, and met her eyes thus fixed upon him.

"I was examining you for some sign of a gnawing grief, an inward dissatisfaction," she said.

She spoke with so much impressiveness that Moore dropped his paper and gazed at her.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Do you want me to have a gnawing grief and an inward dissatisfaction, Salome?"

"Oh no! no!"

Moore rumbled his hair and laughed. Then he took his turn, and gazed scrutinizingly at his wife.

"May I inquire," he began, presently, "if your liver is in excellent working order?"

"It isn't my liver, it's my moral nature," she answered, with such undoubted seriousness that Moore directly became serious himself. But he did not speak.

"I'm afraid my moral nature has been a great trial to you," she said.

"It is you who say that," he answered.

"But I care about you," she continued, "and you care

for truth, dear Randolph"—here Salome paused, and her lips were a trifle unsteady.

Moore took one of her hands and held it closely. But he said nothing.

She began again :

"I want to tell you that I'm not so stupid but that I've known and felt in these months with you that your life is really sweet and upright. You always turn towards the upright course. You are not preachy about it, and you don't pose for it. Mr. Dunn was telling me the other day about what he called the 'W. and M. deal'—perhaps you'll tell me what a deal is some time—that was before you had that money from your uncle, you know. He said that if you had told just a little lie then you would have netted ten thousand dollars at least. He said he should have told the fib; but you never even thought of considering whether you should or not. He said you were the right stuff, but you didn't pretend. That's it, Randolph; you don't pretend. That's one of your charms. Now I should have told that lie. I shouldn't have thought much about it; or, if I had, I shouldn't have thought it would hurt anybody."

Salome ceased speaking. After a while Moore, who was still holding the hand he had taken, asked, in a low voice :

"Is that all?"

"No; or, at least, it's nearly all. The thing I set out to tell you is that I can't live with you and not feel your life; I think that's what I mean. You are so much better than I am. You—"

"Salome!"

"Don't interrupt me. You are as warm-hearted as possible, but you don't just follow your heart as I do. I've noticed that. Is that because you're a man? You needn't smile at me. What I meant really to tell you when I began is that I haven't prevaricated, not the least little bit, for more than ten days. I've been watching myself. There are every so many small ways in which it's so easy not to

tell quite the truth, don't you know? I don't mean what you might call society falsehoods now. But I notice people do lie a good deal, when you come really to think about it."

There was such a naïve flavor in this last remark that Moore could not help smiling, though his eyes were earnest. He thought that he had never imagined any one so frank as Salome could be—an entirely unconscious frankness.

"You mean," he said, with a slight hesitation, "that you are beginning to see the beauty of truth?"

"No; I don't mean that at all."

Moore's expressive face changed and clouded, in spite of his efforts to prevent it.

She withdrew her hand. She leaned back in her chair, gazing down at him. Her eyes were full of light. She seemed to make her glance penetrate to her husband's soul. There was something in her face that made the man more deeply conscious of her love than he had ever been.

"I mean," she said at last, "that I think I have found out that I love you well enough to be truthful just because you want me to be. That isn't much to do for you, is it?"

"Oh, Salome!"

Moore's voice was hardly audible, but his wife heard it.

The intent look between the two was much more than a caress. It was Moore who spoke now.

"And by-and-by you will come to love truth for its own sake."

"I don't know; I can't tell about that. I suppose women are much too personal, aren't they, Randolph? I know very well that it is principle one ought to consider. But I can't do that; not even for you. Now there is my mother—"

"There's a woman who considers principle," interrupted Moore.

"Yes. I was going to say that, well as I love her, it was not enough to make me feel this way. I wonder if God is

pleased with such a love as I give you. Do you think He is? Do you think He blames me? Only He can really know the strength of it. Will it tire you, as time goes on, to be loved so much?"

It was a few weeks after this evening that a messenger-boy came with a note from Mrs. Darrah, who was still at the Vendome. The note stated that the writer of it was nearly bored to death, and would Mrs. Moore take pity on her?

Salome hesitated. She did not much like to be in Mrs. Darrah's presence. Too many unpleasant memories were evoked. And when she was with this lady she was liable to meet Portia Nunally.

The latter had adopted the best possible manner towards Salome—the ignoring of the past.

Though Salome hesitated, after a while she started out to walk across the Common. It was now April, and one of the mild days of that month. The returning warmth did not fail to bring joy with it. She sauntered slowly, stopping upon any pretext. She paused to watch two sparrows fighting.

Raising her eyes as the combatants parted and flew away, her glance encountered that of a man who was leaning against a tree with an open newspaper in his hand.

He was a man past middle life, with a thin, keen, cold face. It was plain that he had been watching her as she had been watching the sparrows.

He gravely raised his hat.

In the first instant of confusion Salome did not recognize him, though she was aware that she knew the face well. Then the knowledge flashed upon her. It was Dr. Jennings.

Her impulse was to hurry on, but she did not quite like to do that, as the gentleman seemed inclined to come forward and speak to her. He did come forward immediately and quickly, but still somehow with an appearance of leisure.

"You look as if you were enjoying this lovely day, Mrs. Moore," he said, much the same as any ordinary man would have spoken.

Salome made an effort, and replied that she was always glad when summer was approaching. This extremely commonplace talk about the seasons need not have affected Salome unpleasantly. She was alarmed that she should begin to feel, as she expressed herself afterwards to her husband, like a fly impaled upon a pin, and wriggling and buzzing for the benefit of the person who has stuck the pin through the insect.

"Only," as she assured Moore, she "did not wriggle in the least; she was just as calm as if she had not felt that way. But," she added, "I thought I couldn't bear it when, as I started to go on down the walk, he came and placed himself beside me and said that he hoped I would allow him to accompany me, as we seemed to be going in the same direction. We didn't speak a word for a few moments, though I was trying as hard as I could to think of something to say that would not be too frivolous nor too sensible. At last I gave up trying; and he had to speak first.

"He asked me if I enjoyed living in Boston, and I told him that I did. Then he smiled and remarked that I had the appearance of enjoying life anywhere. I was very well, wasn't I? Yes, I thanked him, I was very well. Then we came to a branch in the path. I wished that I knew which way he was going, so that I could go the other way. But, of course, I couldn't guess that. However, he lifted his hat in that manner he has which is enough to chill the marrow in one's bones, said that it had been a great pleasure to meet me and 'Good-morning, Mrs. Moore.' I watched him walk off. I was glad he was walking away from me. I had really begun to shiver. I suppose he is one of the most excellent men for cutting and sawing people that there is going, isn't he Randolph?"

"He has that reputation," answered Moore, "and you and I certainly ought to be grateful to him."

"Oh, I'm grateful beyond words for his skill, and I hope he has been paid in money for that," was the response, with more bitterness than Moore had ever heard in her voice.

He looked at her in some surprise.

"Don't reprove me," she said, smiling at him, "because I can't help the effect he has upon me. I think I feel as if I were being vivisected without being allowed an anæsthetic. And the sight of him makes me want to prove to him that I'm not the degraded wretch he thinks me. Boston isn't large enough for him and me. On the other side of the Common I was lucky enough to meet Mrs. Bradford. As we were not far from her house, she quite insisted upon my going home with her. I saw my portrait again. It's just a very little different from what it was when you saw it. She said she shouldn't let it go out of her hands at present. She's just a bit odd about that portrait."

Having said this, Salome reflectively folded and unfolded her handkerchief, gazing down at it. She and her husband were in their rooms at their hotel.

Moore began to be very curious concerning that picture.

"The face is a real little Puritan face now," said Salome. Moore rose.

"I don't wish it to be that," he said, with some indignation. "I want it to be as I saw it last. If she keeps it, she will be continually touching it. It must be as you are now—sensitive, happy, enchanting."

"Oh, thank you, Randolph," with a brilliant smile.

"I'll go there now," he said. "I won't have that portrait subject to any woman's whims, even though that woman be Mrs. Bradford."

Salome seemed troubled. "Don't go until I've told you that I hadn't seen the last of Dr. Jennings," she said. "He was at Mrs. Darrah's. It seems he is an old acquaintance of hers."

The speaker shuddered.

"He sat there and made very pleasant and perfectly

appropriate remarks. He frequently smiled. Have you ever seen him smile, Randolph ?

"It is just as if a piece of polished steel should suddenly scintillate. It was all I could do to keep from trembling with fear and hate when he smiled. He sees right through me, and he is glad every time he comes upon a weakness or a fault. He hasn't any weaknesses or faults. Why should he have? He isn't flesh and blood. He is something that despises flesh and blood ; anyway, he despises me. Randolph, do you know that he makes me think continually when he is in my presence of that forgery, and of the falsehoods I have told, and that I can never reform, and, worst of all, that in the end you will be unhappy with me? Every time I've seen that man I begin immediately to realize that some time you'll be wretched with me ; that you'll curse the day you saw me. Let me be just as melodramatic as I choose, but I mean all I say, and more too. Dr. Jennings thinks I'm a vile creature, and he knows that you will come to grief because of me."

Salome was not given to indulging in any such kind of talk as this. Her nature was essentially sweet and forbearing.

A few moments later Moore was on his way to Mrs. Bradford's. He was uneasy. He did not like to recall the surgeon's look of surprise when he had seen Salome that day in the station. But Salome's repulsion was of no consequence. Some personalities repelled, and some attracted ; and who could tell why it was so ?

He was shown into a reception-room at the Bradford home. He had waited but a moment when the mistress of the house entered.

As she gave him her hand, she said :

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Moore." She hesitated, and then asked : "Do you wish me to be perfectly frank with you? You know a person is very disagreeable when he is perfectly frank."

Moore felt somewhat embarrassed as he stood before

this woman. He had no idea how much his wife might have confided to her. His wife was so strangely given to making confessions sometimes. He could wish that she had not that proclivity.

Even while the young man thought this, he could not but know that this curious openness was one of Salome's strongest charms; it seemed such a contradiction, and it made her something quite out of the ordinary.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Bradford at last, "I will confess to you that I am sorry that I yielded to the temptation and tried to paint Mrs. Moore's portrait."

"Because you think you have not succeeded?"

"No. Don't think me conceited if I say it is because I think I have succeeded too well."

"Oh?"

Moore uttered the exclamation questioningly. He gazed with a bewildered misgiving at his companion.

"I feel haunted by a foolish fear, as if I had assisted at some kind of a betrayal," went on Mrs. Bradford. "That may be a womanish notion. Do you think it is that? But come into the studio. I have given the face several touches of late. Mrs. Moore's countenance is so vividly in my mind that I dare to put a brush to the canvas sometimes when she is not present. I have changed it since she saw it last, and two or three times since you saw it. Of course portrait-painting, if you really care for it, must be more or less of a psychological study."

As she finished speaking, Mrs. Bradford led the way to the studio.

Moore followed her, and walked immediately to the easel. His eager expression changed indescribably as he stood there.

He would not have been able to describe, though he felt keenly, the subtle difference in the face whose eyes were looking directly in his eyes.

The artist stood beside him, watching him.

Finally he turned to her.

"It is much more than beautiful," he said; "it has charm—even a stranger must feel that."

Although he ceased speaking, it appeared as if he had more to say. After a moment's pause, he continued: "It is baffling, bewildering."

"Is she not so?" inquired Mrs. Bradford, in a low voice. "Do you not still find her so? Pardon me, Mr. Moore, but if I talk at all on this subject, I must talk openly. I have never been so confused as since I began this work."

"I can believe that," was the reply, in the same subdued tone in which Mrs. Bradford had spoken.

There was much more that Moore would have liked to say, but he could not. It seemed to him that it would be a relief to speak to this woman from his very heart; still he could not; certainly he must not, if Salome had not spoken.

"Has Mrs. Moore talked with you? Has she said anything?" he asked, somewhat vaguely.

"Oh no," was the immediate response. "Why should she?"

And the speaker's thought instantly was:

"Then there is something."

"I don't know," said Moore, glancing at the woman beside him. "Yes, I do know, too," hastily. "Are you not aware that it would be easy to confide in you?"

Mrs. Bradford shook her head smilingly.

"I had, as I worked, a strange feeling of compunction," she said; "but when Mrs. Moore's mother was here I began to be conscious more and more of something which I could not define."

"What? Has Mrs. Gerry seen the portrait?"

"Yes, just as she was leaving town. She said she did not 'think it was right.' For some reason, Mr. Moore, I have an inclination to believe in her conclusions. I think she arrives at her decisions in a white light, if I may speak thus. You understand me?"

"Yes, yes. Her mind leaps to the right, pure and simple."

Moore spoke with unmistakable emphasis.

"I saw," said Mrs. Bradford, "that she felt as if this portrait was not only a kind of betrayal; it was also a sort of arraignment. Do forgive me, Mr. Moore. I know those words are not the proper ones to use, but I have none which can express the fine shade of my meaning."

Moore was painfully wondering how mere pigments upon canvas could so express the weakness of Salome's moral nature, at the same time that they expressed the strength and richness and faithfulness of what might be called, for lack of a better term, her emotional nature.

"She looks so happy," he said, under his breath.

"She is so happy," said Mrs. Bradford.

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Moore.

Mrs. Bradford took her palette and a large brush. She filled the brush with paint indiscriminately from the palette.

She looked at the man who was still gazing at the picture.

"It is for you to give me permission," she said.

He waited before he answered. At last he said:

"I suppose it is best."

But still the artist hesitated. In an instant she stepped forward and drew the brush broadly and quickly over the glowing face of the portrait. Almost at the same time Moore caught her arm; but he was too late. He was quite pale.

"Good God!" he said, in a whisper.

He felt almost as if it were Salome herself who had been wounded—mortally hurt before his eyes.

Mrs. Bradford also was pale. The hand with which she put down the brush now trembled slightly.

"Did you not mean that I might do this?" she asked, after a silence.

"Yes, yes; I meant it. But it was horrible!—horrible!"

The woman did not speak. She felt that there was nothing for her to say. She had not acted on the impulse of the moment.

Perhaps no one save an artist could quite understand

how much that stroke of the brush had cost her. And, perhaps, she would regret it. Had she acted upon the urging of a mere fantastic sentiment? But her companion had felt the same sentiment also. And when she thought of Mrs. Gerry she did not feel as if it were a whim which had impelled her.

Moore walked to the end of the studio and sat down on a couch. He bent forward with an arm upon each knee. He shaded his eyes with one hand.

Mrs. Bradford removed the canvas from the easel and placed it with its face against the wall. Mingled with her other thoughts was the inward assurance that she had never done better work. But that thought she immediately put away. In view of other things, it was an unworthy subject to think upon.

Moore rose and came towards her.

"You must think me very weak," he said.

"No, no," she answered. "Do you wish me to paint another portrait of Mrs. Moore?—one which shall be merely a conventional likeness? Would it not be better for me to do so? and if any questions are asked concerning this it will be enough to reply that you and I were dissatisfied with it."

"Certainly, that will be enough," answered Moore. "But I'm not sure that I want another portrait. You are so kind," he continued. "We are going out of town in a few weeks now. Perhaps we shall not meet again. Mrs. Bradford," with a sudden increase of earnestness, "I can't help wishing that my wife knew you better. Now, thank you, and good-bye."

Here the lady rose and stood in front of him, gazing at him intently.

"I will think about the portrait. But my feeling is now that I shall not want it," said Moore again.

Mrs. Bradford accompanied her guest into the hall. She extended her hand in farewell.

Though she called later upon Salome, the latter was not at home, and the two did not meet again.

Besides Salome's longing to be in the country with her mother, as the spring grew in warmth and beauty, there was a wish to be out of the way of meeting Mrs. Darrah or Miss Nunally. She never knew when Mrs. Darrah might send for her, and when she was thus sent for Salome did not like to refuse.

On the last occasion, when she had thus visited the Vendome, Portia had been in her aunt's sitting-room, as was to be expected, since she was staying at the hotel with Mrs. Darrah. Dr. Jennings had called again. Salome felt her terror and hate spring into active life the moment she saw him come across the room towards her. She could not give him her hand, as the other ladies did. She drew herself up in a way quite unlike her ordinary genial self and bowed distantly. His coldly hostile glance cut its way, she thought, right to all her faults, as it had done before.

He was very polite. He stood by her side much longer than was necessary, and insisted upon conversing with her.

But she saw him look over at Portia often, and presently he was beside the girl, wearing the air of devotion in a curious way. Still his face did not soften in the least. He gazed at Portia as if she were something inanimate, but which, perhaps, he admired, with perfect self-possession and coolness.

After a little Salome controlled her own feelings sufficiently to enable her to contemplate Portia with some knowledge of her manner. And her manner was unmistakably quelled. At first it seemed that this could not be. But, yes, Dr. Jennings's calm, icy glance took in every detail of Portia's appearance, and then rested with unswerving assurance, and with satisfaction, upon the girl's face. There was not the slightest air of the "lover" about him, but Salome was convinced before she rose to leave that the great surgeon was an admirer of Miss Nunally. She could not in the least guess what would be Portia's

idea of this man as a suitor, for she was so unlike herself that she seemed to be some one else. He talked much and well; he chose his words with perfect accuracy, and he deferred greatly to anything Miss Nunally said, but he did not for an instant fail in the entire and perfectly poised control he exercised over himself and over her. His keen eyes were dominant.

In the course of his conversation Salome learned that he was somewhat out of health, and that he had not, since his return home, resumed the practice of his profession.

That evening Salome expressed to her husband her desire to go into the country directly—the very next day. She said again that Boston was too small to contain both herself and that celebrated surgeon. For some reason she said nothing to Moore about Dr. Jennings and Portia. Perhaps because she did not often wish to speak of Miss Nunally to him. The memories the name awakened could not be pleasant to either.

When Salome was at home with her mother, and Moore was also there, she thought no more, save fleetingly, of Mrs. Darrah and her niece, or of Dr. Jennings. Why should she think of them? She did not see them. All that she loved was with her. Every day the sun rose higher in the heavens; every day the air was warmer and sweeter. The intensity of her temperament, which must make for vivid misery or vivid happiness, made now most gloriously for happiness. The tropical luxuriousness of her nature enabled her to give up entirely to this happiness. She did not spoil it by questioning. The New England part of her was so much in abeyance that she could successfully put the questioning and the introspection away.

She tried not to forget the resolves she had made concerning truth. She used to talk with Moore on this subject as they sat under the trees in hot, sunny days, or strolled over the high, sweet-smelling pastures.

Moore had never dreamed of being so happy. It seemed to him now that his hopes were being fulfilled. Salome

was proving herself to be susceptible to that influence that should make her respect the truth. How could she avoid this result in the presence, as she was, of the two beings whom she so loved, and who so loved her?

"I would do anything for you," she said again, as she and Moore sat under a pine-tree which grew at the very top of a pasture. And then she added, with a laugh, "I would even tell the truth."

XVII

"THE END IS VISION"

MOORE winced a little.

"I love to have you do things for me," he responded, "only, you know, if I were out of the question, you must still tell the truth."

He had not spoken like this since their talk in Boston, when she had avowed her intention of "reforming for his sake." He had often been curious to know if she still based her idea of reformation on that one foundation—for his sake. But he had dreaded to ask.

She looked at him attentively. At last she said :

"I can do this or that because you like to have me, and because I love you. But I cannot make myself over. I've been trying, and I can't do it. I've tried for two reasons : because I hate Dr. Jennings, and because I love you. But I know now it's true that we don't change. I know it just as well as if I had worked years to prove it. Even a love like mine for you doesn't change me. You know what Schopenhauer says of the 'unchangeableness of innate tendencies in the individual, and the invariability of the primitive disposition.' He thinks only 'appearances are refined, and that there is no change below the surface.' "

"But what business have you with Schopenhauer?" asked Moore, with some heat. "Why do you read such depressing stuff as he writes? We might as well give up life and all hope of everything if you believe what he says."

"But if what he says is true," inquired Salome, mournfully, "what shall we do then? You love truth so well,

Randolph, that you don't want to choose to try to believe a thing because it's pleasant, do you? I might do that; I think I should, for I turn to whatever will make me happy. But you?

"You see, when I was in Boston I used to go to the Public Library sometimes when you were away. When you have a thing in mind it is odd how you stumble upon the subject everywhere, almost. So I happened to read occasionally what other people had thought about what I was thinking so much. I didn't get much encouragement. Even Darwin said that he was 'inclined to believe that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of any one, and that most of our qualities are innate'—and Francis Galton thinks so too."

Moore stared at his wife. He hardly knew whether it would be better to laugh at her or to treat the conversation seriously. He decided that it would be frivolous to do the former.

"Did you read anything on the other side?" he asked.

"Oh yes; I've read a lot on the other side," was the reply. "And you know that's the way I was brought up—to think that we can make ourselves over—or rather that God, Christ, can make us over if we will allow it. Were you brought up so, Randolph?"

"Yes."

"I suppose my mother believes that; I know she does."

Salome spoke with deep solemnity. She held her husband's hand, but she was not looking at him; she was gazing down the slope of the field into the blinding sunshine that was making the air glimmer with heat, and bringing out the perfume of the wild, odorous shrubs all about them.

"Yes," Salome went on; "my mother thinks that we can make of ourselves, in a degree, what we will. Perhaps my mother could do that. But I have about made up my mind that we are, after all, more or less the slaves of inherited tendencies."

Moore's face darkened with the pain her words gave him. She turned towards him in time to see that expression. She put her head on his shoulder.

"Don't look so," she whispered.

"But I thought you had some of the Christian beliefs," he said; "the Christian beliefs are surely high and noble ones. It needs no argument to show that."

"I used to be a real, truly little Christian," she said, smiling — "that is, I was a skin-deep one. But I didn't know then that I was so shallow, and that I was, in fact, a pagan. Are you sorry that I am a pagan, Randolph? But you needn't worry, and don't tell mother that I've been talking so silly. I've been just as truthful all these months as if I cared for the truth. But it is you I care for."

Moore tried not to show the depression he felt. All that day and the next it seemed to him that he could think of nothing save the subject of this conversation, in which he had borne so slight a part.

On the third day the two were sitting again under the same tree. They had brought some books to read, but after a little Moore shut his own volume, and, leaning forward, he put his hand on the open page of Salome's book.

"I know it's stupid to read," she said. "It's a thousand times better to just sit and take in this day."

Moore replied that he had a great deal to say, and he proceeded forthwith to say it. He began by protesting, with all the warmth of an actually painful conviction, that a human being need never be a slave to anything; that the mind and the will were to be used to cultivate this tendency and to suppress that tendency. It was nothing less than criminal for a man to decide that, because he happened to be born with an inclination to stoop, he should not try to throw back his shoulders and stand erect. No doubt it was harder for him to stand erect than for some one else who had a good backbone to begin with. It was just so with the moral nature.

The young man went on hurriedly, but with some force and clearness, to state those arguments which have been the foundation of so much right living since the world began. He had never talked so openly and forcefully to Salome since he had known her, but all the time he was speaking, and notwithstanding her dependent attitude and her absorbed listening, he knew that his words were like water washing over a stone.

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of a sentence. He felt as if a cold hand had been laid upon him, or as if some voice had whispered the word "Impossible!" in his ear.

Salome raised her head from his shoulder, where she had kept it closely all the time he had been speaking.

"Why don't you go on?" she asked.

Moore tried to smile.

"Why should I go on?" he inquired. "I am tired, and I'm sure you are more tired than I am, and besides it occurs to me that all these words are thrown away. You know what Browning says:

"Though we prayed you,
Brayed you in a mortar,
For you could not, Sweet.'

And it also occurs to me that you may have just as good a right to think as you do as I have to think as I do. Only—" Here Moore abruptly rose to his feet. A deep red flush mounted to his forehead as he exclaimed: "I wish to God that we did not differ about a vital moral point!"

Salome leaned her head back against the tree-trunk. Her eyes were fixed on her husband's face.

Moore felt helplessly that he could tear out his tongue for having spoken impatiently to any one who could look at him like that.

"Oh, I can't help it! I can't help it!" exclaimed Salome. She clasped her hands as she added: "But perhaps

I shall be able to act as you want me to, though I can't be what you want me to be."

What could Moore do but throw himself down at his wife's side and try to comfort her? He made a resolve that he would never again attempt to make her other than she was—since the effort, besides being entirely useless, was fraught with such pain for them both.

Afterwards, thinking of the matter more calmly by himself, he extracted a great deal of comfort from the thought that Salome was really different in her outward regard for truth.

Now, as the two sat there, a figure turned in at the open bars at the bottom of the pasture. Salome saw it first, but she was not far-sighted; she could only see that it was a human figure.

Moore, however, sprang up. His glance, he was sure, could not be mistaken in the carriage of the stranger.

"It's Miss Nunally," he said. "I'm going to run away. Of course it's you she wishes to see. Odd that she should come out here."

And Moore strode off into the young oak-wood that grew on the other side of the hill.

Salome watched Portia as she slowly came up the slope. She dreaded the meeting. She wondered what freak had sent the girl here. She had lost all track of Mrs. Darrah and her niece since she had come to her old home, and she was glad of it. She wished that she might never see them again. And yet she knew that she could still feel that personal charm which belonged to Miss Nunally in so marked a degree.

When she was still a good many rods away Portia threw back her parasol and looked up the hill. She saw Salome, who was now standing, and who waved her hand in response to the same gesture.

In a few moments the two women had greeted each other, and were sitting on the pine-needles. Portia took off her hat and ran her fingers through her hair.

"I wanted to see you alone," remarked the new-comer, "and when your mother said that I should probably find you and Mr. Moore under this pine-tree, I quite reckoned upon his going away, as he has kindly done. Don't excuse him. I should have asked him to go if he hadn't already gone."

Having spoken thus, Portia relapsed into a silence that she appeared to have no intention of breaking.

Salome wondered if she had come merely to sit beside her and say nothing. She looked at her closely. She thought her companion looked old and depressed. There seemed nothing at all of the usual brilliant, challenging air that was so stimulating to any one who was with this woman. There was an inertness in her attitude, in the hands, that was not merely fatigue. It was not until a long time had passed that Portia said:

"It is very beautiful here. But it's a great mistake to be made so that one is obliged to feel beauty. I'm looking forward to old age, when I shall not feel anything."

She turned towards Salome.

"For all that has happened, or can happen, it will always be lovely to be with you, Salome. It isn't your goodness, you know. It's yourself."

Salome returned the gaze fixed upon her. She asked, in a whisper:

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," was the answer. "Only I'm engaged."

Salome involuntarily drew back.

"To that man?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," the other replied. "I thought that if I ever wanted to be dissected alive he would be delighted to do it, and that no one could do it more skilfully. He never bungles about anything. I should hate a bungler."

"But do you love him?"

"What an old-fashioned question! You are so ridiculous, Salome. No, I don't love him. I don't want to,

either. Think of what a woman must suffer who should love Cyrus Jennings! He is absolutely respectable. I don't think he ever did a wrong thing in his life. He is always correct. You know his reputation in his profession. He has quite a property; his income is very large. He is able, brilliant. He is like a steel blade—no, not steel, for one might strike a spark from steel—a blade of ice, sharp and cold. He hasn't any emotions to deplete him. He ought to live forever. I think he will. But, thank Heaven! I shall not live forever, and I believe in marrying for money, particularly if you can respect your husband; and if I can't respect mine, it will be my own fault."

Portia had spoken all this with her peculiar deliberateness of utterance.

Now she turned towards Salome. She placed her hand, which, in spite of the heat, was cold, upon Salome's arm.

"Perhaps it was strange," she said, now speaking unsteadily, "but I wanted to see you—I felt as if I must see you before—before it happened. And I don't think we shall ever meet again. Dr. Jennings is going to London. He is already known there, and a most flattering offer has been made to him."

She finished the last sentence quite firmly.

Salome put her arm about her companion's shoulders.

"Oh, don't do it!" she cried.

"Yes, I shall do it," was the hard reply. "But I wanted to see you once more," and her voice trembled again. "This is the last time I mean to have any kind of feeling—the very last," in a passionate tone. "It is freezing to be with that man. I'm afraid of the glance of his eyes; when he speaks he chills me; and yet I have a strange kind of admiration for him. Think of my being afraid of any one! Or, rather, you need not think of me at all. You will not. You are too happy. And now I'm going."

She made an attempt to rise, but Salome held her hands.

"When," she asked—"when is it to be?"

"To-morrow."

"So soon! That is dreadful!"

"Oh no, not dreadful. It is an extremely brilliant match; suitable in every way. Besides, you know 'if it were done it were well it were done quickly.' And I trust I shall be grateful because I have made out so well."

Here a violent sob shook the girl's form. But there were no tears in her eyes.

She released one of her hands and put her arm around Salome.

"You are a natural woman," she said; "there's no make-believe about you. And you are happy—I hope you'll be able to keep up that habit of being happy. And now good-bye."

"Can nothing stop you?" asked Salome.

"Yes; one thing: death. There might be another thing—love; but that is now impossible for me. Good-bye."

The two women kissed each other, and Portia walked away. Salome did not sit down. She continued standing, watching the girl go down the hill as she had watched her come up.

At the very bottom of the slope Portia turned. She made no gesture. She stood gazing for a moment at the woman beneath the tree. Then she went on out of sight.

Mrs. Gerry said that Miss Nunally had come alone in a carriage from the railroad station. She had fastened the horse in the yard of the cottage on the ledge, and, when she had made her inquiries, had gone on. On her return she drove away without coming to the house again.

When Salome told her mother of the intended marriage, Mrs. Gerry remarked that, as she remembered Dr. Jennings, and if she were not mistaken, he was probably the only person who could control that woman.

"But she'll be unhappy," said Salome.

"She'll have herself to thank, then," responded Mrs. Gerry. Then she added, in a more charitable tone, "But we won't judge her. When I saw her face I was sorry for her."

"You needn't waste any sorrow on her," now remarked Moore, rather sharply. "She will get what she has bargained for—money and position. She hasn't any heart; she has only emotions. And such women are the cruellest creatures in the world. And Jennings is a gentleman, anyway."

The others said nothing more.

On the second day from that of her brief visit cards came from Dr. and Mrs. Cyrus Jennings to the Moores. Salome would not look at them. And it was in silence that she read an item that Moore showed her in a paper which told of the departure of the great surgeon and his bride for a residence in London.

Salome could hardly understand the pain the thought of this marriage gave. And she could not understand, try as she would, anything of the springs of action in a woman like Portia Nunally, who seemed refined and fastidious; but no woman could be either refined or fastidious who could deliberately choose to make a marriage of convenience.

After this incident nothing seemed to happen all the rest of the summer and through the delightful fall. The autumn gave day after day of wonderful sweetness and beauty—that indescribable sweetness which only a New England autumn gives in its fullest measure. It is such calm days which, as they pass, seem to leave no mark, which yet go further than anything else to the deepening of delight.

Sometimes Nely Scudder would come over to the cottage, and she and Salome would go into the woods or fields for hours. No day was ever too hot for Salome, and Nely did not like to acknowledge that she could not bear comfortably a heat which appeared to steep Salome's consciousness in pleasure.

Moore would lie in a hammock under the trees near the house, and his wife would lean over him and express her pity for one who did not know how to appreciate a temperature that was simply perfect. She assured him that

she did not wish him to stir, but she and Nely were going out to enjoy the day. Once, as she came thus to bid him good-bye, she said that there was only one drawback. Here she hesitated, and waited for Moore to question her.

"And what is that?"

"I'm a little afraid—afraid of myself," she answered. "Something that has been asleep in me wakes. But you think I'm fanciful, don't you, Randolph? Tell me that you think so."

"I most certainly know that you are absurdly fanciful," was the prompt and emphatic response.

"Yes; you must be right," she returned. She looked up at the sky. "Did you ever see such a hot, pale blue? It is almost as hot as a Florida sky in summer; almost, but not quite. On such days I think of that man my mother tells me about—the man from the West Indies, her grandfather, whom every one loved, but who had no principle. He was my great-grandfather, you know, and none of his descendants have been in the least like him, until I was born, and they didn't suspect it in me for a long time. Now read yourself to sleep."

She turned away. Moore half rose. He had an impulse to call her back. But he did not. He did not remember that she had ever mentioned that West Indian ancestor in just that way before. Indeed, she rarely spoke of him.

Mrs. Gerry came out before the two figures were hidden among the trees. She gazed at them. Then she turned towards Moore, and their eyes met in a glance of affection.

"Salome is happy," she said.

"Yes," answered the young man, his face glowing responsive.

The October "days of golden glory" always have a background of approaching winter, but sometimes this background seems a long way off. It seemed a long way off

this fall, which the Moores spent in the country. Every night the sun left a flush behind him in which the stars slowly appeared. The crickets kept up their agreeable monotony. There was little wind, and the bright leaves hung on the trees of the hills, and flamed along by the narrow water-courses. The green pines stood against the scarlet oaks.

"I reckon we sh'll git our pay for this," remarked Mr. Scudder one morning, as he stopped at the cottage to leave a pound of butter. "I ain't known no such fall since '67, when it lasted right up to December. But we had a tough old winter."

"Do let us enjoy this while it lasts," responded Salome.

"I s'pose you folks are goin' to git red of the winter," said Mr. Scudder, putting the change given in payment for the butter into a wash-leather bag that he had extracted from a pocket which seemed to reach nearly down to his knee. "When you goin' to start?"

"We thought we'd be off about the middle of November," replied Mrs. Gerry.

When he had gone Salome sat in silence by the window for a while.

Mrs. Gerry felt somehow that this was not the silence of assent, and she did not understand it.

The two were alone, for Moore had gone to Boston. Salome had been washing dishes and helping "do up the work." Both women had objected to Moore's proposal that they have a servant. They said a servant would take away all the home feeling. A New England woman who is not born to wealth does not like the idea of receiving service in the household; it confuses her.

Suddenly Salome said: "I suppose you'd be glad not to go, mother?"

Mrs. Gerry was putting a stick of wood into the cook-stove. The two were in the kitchen, where the sunlight was coming in through the east window.

She hastily shut the stove, and then turned to look fully

at her daughter. Salome smiled into her mother's anxious eyes.

"I shall be glad to go anywhere with you, child," she answered.

"I've changed my mind," said Salome. "I've decided not to go South this winter."

"Not to go?"

Mrs. Gerry repeated the words in amazement. She knew well with what joy Salome had anticipated the coming winter in the South with her mother and her husband. She knew that not to go must be something like turning away from Paradise for her daughter.

"Of course you are surprised," said the younger woman.

"Yes, I am. Does Randolph know?"

"I haven't spoken of it before. I wanted to tell you first. Mother—" Salome rose quickly from her chair, went to her mother's side, and put her arms about her in that way that always made the heart of the elder woman start with tenderness and fear—fear of she knew not what.

"Mother," whispered Salome, "I'm afraid. I can't go. I wanted to tell you. Don't do anything about getting ready; I shall not go."

Mrs. Gerry sat down and drew her child into her lap, as she had done years ago. She pressed her hand on Salome's head, which rested on her shoulder.

"What is it?" she asked. "Why are you afraid?"

All the sickening anxiety which for months had been sleeping suddenly sprang fully awake in the woman's mind. She began instinctively, as of old, to arm herself that she might help her girl in whatever way she might need help.

"I'm afraid of myself," answered Salome.

Her mother held her still more closely, and waited until she should say more. In a moment Salome went on:

"You know I'm trying to be good. Perhaps you didn't know it, but I am. I'm not really any more good, because I feel just the same. But Randolph—and you—have been so unhappy—I needn't explain, need I?—"

Mrs. Gerry shook her head. There was more intensity in Salome's words now :

"Well, it's been so hard, so almost impossible for me to be—to be the kind of girl I ought to be—this last summer, you know—in the lovely hot weather when such impulses spring up in me, and part of me clamors to yield, and the New England part of me, I call it that, says I must not yield, and all the time I feel as if it were right, only that Randolph—and you—want me to be a different kind of woman. And I'm wretched at thought of doing what you don't like. Oh, do you understand? I can't tell you so you'll understand, I'm afraid. I want to live with the two people I love, in the South—and just live. But I've made up my mind to stay in the North because—don't laugh at me—perhaps in time in the North I could cultivate a conscience, and so do a thing because it is right. I've found out this summer for sure that when the weather is so divinely hot I'm more of a pagan than ever. It all sounds queer enough when I put it in words, doesn't it? But it's true. I wish it were not true. No, don't speak yet. It's just as if there were something coiled up in me that is my real, genuine self, aside from all my bringing up, you know. In the South this something moves and moves, and then uncoils and comes to a beautiful life and takes possession of me; and I drink in all the beauty of that wonderful country where there isn't any snow, and where the sun gets into my blood, and I know that this world is all there is—this magnificent, seductive world that smiles at me, and beckons me and intoxicates me."

Salome pressed her face more closely into her mother's neck.

"No, I shall not go South. You see, mother, I cannot go."

Mrs. Gerry felt the slender figure vibrate in her arms. She could not yet speak. She was keenly alive to the feeling that this child, who was so unutterably dear, was yet alien to her. She could not understand her. There is

something terrible in loving intensely something which must forever remain a mystery to us.

Now, as ever, Mrs. Gerry tried first of all to hold herself in hand. She must remain outwardly calm, at least. Besides the good of being calm just for the sake of calmness, this state of her faculties would enable her to be of greater help to her daughter.

"Are you going to urge me to go?" at last inquired Salome. "Because it won't do any good."

"No; I'm not going to urge you. I think you ought to consult Randolph," said Mrs. Gerry.

"Yes," was the answer.

Mrs. Gerry's clear mind noted that, while Salome really had no regard for uprightness for itself, she was yet curiously free from a quite common duplicity as regarded her motives for action. She was possessed of an almost startling frankness as to her inner self. And this also was entirely foreign to the Yankee woman who was, from the very necessity of her nature, deeply reserved.

She was sure it would be entirely useless to talk further on this subject. All talk which convinces no one only tends to the confirming of the old opinions.

And it was not opinions with Salome; it was her inward self, as the color of her eyes was part of her outward self. Why should any one attempt to reason with Salome because her eyes were hazel? Of what earthly good to convince her that they should have been blue?

One thing Mrs. Gerry did say:

"Have you thought of your health? You know it is good for your health to be in the South in the winter."

"I haven't thought much about it. I think I shall be well. I did not go South last year."

"I know. But you had some trouble in your chest."

"No more than three-quarters of the people have," was the feminine reply.

Mrs. Gerry said no more then. For herself, she was glad not to go. For her the South had no charms; it was

a place where such people as Job Maine lived, and where, if you wanted to live otherwise, you must be rich and lavish money wickedly. And the climate took all her strength; it did not brace her as a good Northern winter braced. Notwithstanding all this, however, Mrs. Gerry would gladly have gone, because by doing so she could add to her child's well being.

XVIII

"THE END IS VISION AND THE END IS NEAR"

"WHAT is all this about Salome's not going South this fall?" Moore asked the next day, as he found Mrs. Gerry alone.

"Hasn't she told you?" was the return question.

"She says she is afraid to go," he answered.

Moore's voice involuntarily softened as he said this. To him there was always an undertone of pathos in everything connected with his wife.

The two did not discuss the reason for Salome's fear.

"Are you going to urge her to go?" inquired Mrs. Gerry.

"No; she shall do as she pleases. Only, for the sake of her health, I wish she did not feel this way."

Mrs. Gerry appeared to be deeply considering the cranberries she was picking over. Finally she said: "Sometimes I feel like advising you to insist upon her going."

"But she has such a strong feeling; she says she can't trust herself. Mother, do you think that is all mere fancy? Just a womanish notion which I ought to combat?"

Mrs. Gerry took another handful of berries. She looked at them intently, but blindly. Her lips were pressed close together.

"Don't combat it," she at last replied. "The older I grow the more I see the uselessness of meddling with the individuality of another. But it takes a lifetime to learn that. I thought I brought Salome up right, but now I don't know. She was just like other good, conscientious girls—only nicer—until she went South and got well. Then she seemed to shed her bringing-up as snakes shed their skins.

It wasn't any part of her, after all; and I had thought that it was."

Mrs. Gerry dropped the berries, which she had not picked over, into the wrong dish. She pushed the chair which held the two dishes away from her, and sat upright. But she was deliberate in her movements; there was no appearance of disturbance about her.

"Randolph," she said.

She placed her berry-stained hand on his arm.

"I'm afraid she'll try you a good deal as the years go on. Do you think you can be patient with her?"

"I think so," was the answer, with solemn earnestness. And he added, "You know I love her."

Moore took the hand from his arm and held it an instant. He had one serious talk with his wife on the subject of going South; he felt that he must do that; but the matter was decided as Salome wished. Moore could not remonstrate with her when her sole reason for remaining in the North was that she felt that she could thus the better school herself to be what he approved.

Unknown to his wife, Moore consulted a celebrated physician as to the probability of her being able to stay at home without harm to herself. It was that same Dr. Bowdoin who had been summoned by Mr. Gerry to prescribe for his daughter.

Moore tried to believe that it was solely on account of her weak chest that he did thus, but secretly he longed to have a skilled and unbiassed opinion concerning a few of Salome's characteristics. Without giving details which would have been compromising, he yet made a rather clear statement of some of Salome's tendencies.

The physician took his words with that easy comfortable-ness which is so cheering.

"Ah, I see," he said. "Her real self and her nurture are at variance; that's confusing. We are bound to live our real selves more or less, and we often confound what we were born to be with what we are educated to be. A mat-

ter of heredity frequently does not display itself until certain surroundings call it into life. This is evidently very marked in this case. And she is abnormal to a degree, of course. You needn't start; we are all more or less abnormal; we must own up to that. It's only the rank and file who are not in the least so. A person with no marked mental or physical idiosyncrasy is strictly normal. Now about her going South—" Here the doctor meditated a moment. He asked two or three questions.

"I would advise her to go," he said.

Moore was more perturbed by the advice than he had expected to be, for he had anticipated this counsel.

He kept it to himself for some days; then he informed Mrs. Gerry, who tried to conceal her distress.

But there was the fact that Salome suffered little from the previous winter, and that she seemed well now. Still the two decided that she must know what the doctor had said.

She only smiled at the information. It plainly had not the slightest effect upon her.

And so the subject was definitely dropped. The project of almost forcing a woman to go South was not to be thought of.

The fall days continued so beautiful that it seemed as if they would never cease.

But at last a warm rain began, and when, after two days, it stopped, a sharp wind from the northwest sprang up and raved over the fields and woods, stripping off the late lingering leaves, making the sky a steel blue. At sunset it subsided, but there was not one cricket brave enough to make a sound over all the land round about.

The squashes and pumpkins were brought and put under piazza roofs. The farmers' wives carefully took up the house plants which they had set in the garden for the summer, and they spread old comforters over some late blooms that they might enjoy them a few days more. "For," they said, "we shall have a little more warm weather after this cold spell."

The next morning the white frost was on everything ; it even covered the grass on the south side of the Gerry cottage.

And there was no "warm spell" after it. Winter came on hurriedly. Flurries of snow hastened through the air. The chickadees flitted cheerily among the trees. But the bluebirds were all gone.

"Don't you change your mind the least little bit?" asked Moore, as he and his wife breasted the sharp wind in a walk from the post-office one day.

This same wind had given her a lovely color. She laughed gayly.

"I'm always changing my mind," she answered, "but not about going South. And, Randolph," taking his arm, "it's all for your sake. I'm getting to know myself so well."

The two women wished to stay in the country until after Christmas ; then the Moores would set up housekeeping in Boston, and Mrs. Gerry would live with them.

Moore had taken a house, and it gave Salome and her mother a great deal of interesting employment to oversee the furnishing of it.

The cold weather seemed to have no effect on Salome. She was in the best of spirits. She would have cheered her husband and her mother if they had needed cheering.

One day she suddenly said to Moore :

"You didn't want my portrait, after all?"

She had not mentioned the subject before, and had asked no questions when her husband had briefly told her that he and the artist were dissatisfied with the work.

"Yes, certainly, I wanted it," he answered, promptly. "I meant to talk with you about that, but I haven't done so. And I wondered that you were not curious."

"I was curious, but I guessed."

"Well, what did you guess?" Moore turned towards her and asked his question quickly.

It had seemed to him before his marriage that it would be endlessly interesting to study Salome. And he was still of the same mind. If there were lacking in this study an element of rest quite necessary to everyday life, who was to blame? Not Salome, surely.

"I guessed that the portrait was too much like me," she replied.

She was watching his face, and she added :

"And now I know I was right."

Neither tried to continue the subject. It was something that it seemed quite impossible to talk about ; and now to Moore, looked at in the light of the past, and without the portrait before him, the whole affair had a fanciful and ludicrous aspect. He would have unmercifully derided the incident had others been concerned in it. Or so he half thought now.

He still was obliged to go to New York occasionally concerning the property he had inherited and to arrange as to a business project. Because he was now a rich man was no reason why, in his eyes, he should be an idle one. He was essentially active, and he had a strong taste for mercantile pursuits. He had intended, however, to allow these plans to remain in the background through the winter, which he had expected to spend in the South. Now this was changed.

Meanwhile the two women were busy with household furnishings. To the elder woman these furnishings seemed wickedly lavish ; but the younger one took easily and naturally to all luxuries, though she was perfectly content without them.

Coming out to the cottage one night in the week before Christmas, Salome and her mother found that there was no "depot wagon" in waiting at the station. It had been discontinued for the season for the first time that day. The agent said "it didn't pay for cart-wheel grease to run a carriage in the winter for this train, so old Little had stopped."

The only two passengers who had alighted here stood a moment on the platform by the agent, who was swinging his lantern back and forth. It had snowed in the forenoon; but afterwards the weather had grown warmer. It was mild and starlight now, and the clear crescent of a new moon was in the west.

"It's only a mile and a half, mother," said Salome; "we must walk."

"I wish 'twas better going," was the response. "But it's no use trying to get a horse, for we can't do it."

So they set out. It was only six o'clock, but the feeling and the aspect of the surroundings indicated midnight at least.

They walked through what in this part of the country was currently and graphically called "posh," and trousers and rubber boots are the suitable array for any one who must travel in such stuff.

Although these two wore overshoes, a woman's overshoes amount to very little in the way of protection, except against a slight dampness.

After a few rods their feet were soaked in snow-water. Then they ceased trying to pick their way with raised skirts and hesitating steps, after the manner of women.

"We might as well splash right along," said Salome, who was in high spirits.

So they did splash along through the half-melted snow. And when they reached home they changed their clothes, brewed some ginger tea and drank it, sitting side by side in front of the cook-stove with their feet in the oven.

"If you only haven't taken cold," said Mrs. Gerry, as they sipped their drink and were comfortable and cosey.

"If you only haven't taken cold yourself!" was the retort, with a gay laugh, and a hug from the arm whose hand did not hold the cup of ginger tea.

Mrs. Gerry rose towards morning and went into her daughter's room.

"Is that you, mother?" inquired the fresh young voice in a wide-awake manner.

"I was so foolish as to get to worrying," was the apologetic reply.

Salome raised herself on her arm. Her eyes shone in the lamplight.

"You must act on the ground that there is no such thing as catching cold," she said; "then you can't take cold because there's no cold to take."

Salome laughed a little, gave a slight cough, and put her head back on the pillow.

She looked so very wide awake that her mother asked if she had been asleep.

"I don't think I have," was the answer; "but my thoughts have been so unusually clear that I have quite enjoyed them."

There was something, she hardly knew what, that now thoroughly alarmed Mrs. Gerry; therefore she was apparently more than usually calm and matter-of-fact.

That day Salome did not seem really ill, though she did not refuse to sit or lie all day long in the kitchen where her mother was persistently busy. And she was very gay. One might almost have said that something—what could it be?—had happened to please her.

Sometimes she coughed shortly and dryly. Twice when she did so there was a spot of bright scarlet on her handkerchief. But her mother did not know that.

Without knowing that, however, Mrs. Gerry had gone over to Mr. Scudder's for butter, and had asked Mr. Scudder to drive to the station and telegraph to that Dr. Bowdoin who had, a few years before, sent Salome to Florida.

But no hint of this errand could be seen in her manner when she returned with the butter.

The two talked cheerfully. When evening came Salome coughed a little more, and her cheeks were red. Her mother brought her some milk to drink. She made a pretence of wanting it very much, but she could not quite conceal the effort required to enable her to drink it.

When it drew towards midnight Mrs. Gerry told Salome

that she expected Dr. Bowdoin from Boston in that train ; Mr. Scudder would bring him from the station. She added, by way of explanation :

"I was afraid you might have a touch of pneumonia, and I wanted the best advice ; since I knew Randolph would approve."

Before the doctor arrived a bed had been put up in the bit of a sitting-room, and Salome was established in it. She was still so cheerful as to be almost gay. She said it was really absurd to make any arrangement like that.

When Dr. Bowdoin came he sat by Salome's bed for half an hour. He put very few questions. Only talked a little with her.

In the kitchen with Mrs. Gerry he asked, sharply :

"Why didn't she go South, as I recommended? She would have been saved this."

Mrs. Gerry was white, but composed.

"We couldn't persuade her to go," she answered. She made a moment's pause, then she asked, firmly :

"Will you tell me how she is? I must know."

The man looked at her keenly.

"You know just as well as I do," he answered, "that she is bad—very bad. She is going to have that kind of phthisis which only lasts a few weeks."

Mrs. Gerry stood erect. She did not make a gesture.

Dr. Bowdoin placed a chair for her, and gently made her sit.

"It sounds brutal to tell you," he said, "but one must know the truth. Isn't your daughter happy?" he inquired.

"Very happy," was the answer.

"But she doesn't want to live," was the startling statement from the doctor.

Mrs. Gerry could not speak. She looked at the man before her.

"I'm sure of it," he added, "though she said no such thing. But it makes no difference. She has this predis-

position — it could not be safe for her to spend winters in this climate. In fact, she ought to have lived all the time South."

Then followed some directions, to which Mrs. Gerry listened carefully.

The doctor said he would come again in three days. Mr. Scudder, a few moments later, took him to an adjoining town, where he could catch a train to Boston.

Mrs. Gerry was left alone in the cottage with Salome.

She sat down on the lounge where Salome had lain the day before. She sat on the very edge, her hands lying in her lap.

She did not know how long she sat there, but not long.

Presently she rose and went softly to the door of the sitting-room.

Her child was sleeping now. Her child. Not the grown woman and wife, but her child.

"Our little girl," her husband used to call her.

She stood in the middle of the room. Every one knows how keen is the mechanical vision at such times.

Mrs. Gerry's eyes took in every homely detail of the place. She saw a slip of paper on the lounge by the pillow where Salome had been lying that day. Without knowing or caring what it was, the woman picked up the newspaper cutting, adjusted her glasses, and held it to the lamp. She read it, or she would have said she was reading it, though her mind did not at first take in a single word, much less an idea.

She did not know what to do. She stood there with the lamp in one hand and the slip in the other.

Presently, however, her mind absorbed the printed lines, and, as sometimes happens, they immediately began to form part of this experience. Afterwards she could never recall this illness without recalling, word for word, what she read then. And always her whole being strenuously and piteously rebelled, as we mortals must rebel to the end of time, even though we have phases of faith and hope.

"Where are the voices kings were glad to hear?
Where now the feast, the song, the bayadere?
The end is nothing, and the end is near.

"And yonder lovely rose; alas! my dear!
See the November garden rank and drear;
The end is nothing, and the end is near.

"Then vex thyself no more with thought austere,
Take what thou canst while thou abidest here,
Seek finer pleasures each returning year;

"The end is nothing, and the end is near.
Joy is the Lord, and Love his charioteer;
Be tranquil and rejoicing, oh, my dear!

"Shun the wild seas, far from the breakers steer;
The end is vision and the end is near.
List to the wisdom learned of Saint and Seer!

"The living Lord is Joy, and peace His sphere;
Rebel no more! Throw down thy shield and spear,
Surrender all thyself; true life is here;

"The end is vision and the end is near.
Forget not this, forget not that, my dear!
'Tis all and nothing, and the end is near.
—Writ on a ruined palace in Kashmir."

Having read these verses twice through, Mrs. Gerry walked across the room and carefully placed the lamp on the table. She noiselessly put some wood in the stove. She would sit up the rest of the night. Why should she lie down? She could not sleep. Probably Salome would not need her, but she could not sleep.

And the child had been reading such words as these? They were pagan words. There was no glimmer of high faith in them. It was as if this world were all there was. This world! Why, this world was nothing—nothing. In the world to come was the substance, the fruition, the fulfilment of God's promises. If it were not so— Here the woman's thoughts, which had gone on coherently, suddenly

paused, as over a black abyss. But her faith spread wings to fly over this abyss. If that faith might only take Salome, her own child, with her. In death, as in life, she must take care of Salome.

Sitting there motionless, with her hands resting on the slip of paper, the mother endured that night what she could never tell.

And in the next room Salome slept.

In the morning Mrs. Gerry, when she was sure her daughter was fully awake, took in a dainty breakfast, carefully arranged. She said that, as Salome had fallen asleep so late, she would indulge her.

By noon the invalid was up and dressed and in the arm-chair by the kitchen stove. She would rather be where her mother was at work. She did not seem very ill. Mrs. Gerry had not sent for Moore, because he was to arrive that afternoon.

Salome sat where she could see him when he turned the curve in the road from the station. There he was, tall and strong, and striding along briskly. He recognized her and tossed up his hat. She saw his eyes shine; his teeth gleamed under his yellow mustache.

Mrs. Gerry was furtively watching her daughter's face. A look of intense agony was on that face for an instant; then it was gone. Salome did not take her gaze from her husband as long as he was in sight.

The next moment he had entered the room and she had sprung up to meet him.

All the rest of the day Mrs. Gerry felt like a coward. She carefully avoided being alone with Moore for a moment. It seemed to her that she could not say to him what she knew she must say.

At last the time came. Moore followed her out into the shed where the wood was stored. Salome was asleep on the lounge. She had been coughing, and he had seen the splotches of blood on her handkerchief, though she did not know that he had seen them.

Mrs. Gerry felt her arm taken in a fierce hold.

She looked up. Meeting the young man's eyes, she suddenly leaned against him, shivering.

But he did not shiver. He was tense.

"We will go to Florida next week," he whispered, eagerly. "The South cured her before; it will cure her again."

He held his companion closely to him.

She shook her head.

"No, no. It will do no good. The doctor will tell you. But I don't need any doctor to tell me. I've seen this before. We must try to be cheerful with her."

She removed herself from Moore's hold. He kept himself rigid.

"Good God! Good God!" he cried. "I can't bear it."

He went out-of-doors. He had gone only a few yards when Mrs. Gerry called him back; she had his hat and overcoat. She told him that he must keep well.

When Dr. Bowdoin came he forbade them to think of going South.

"Make her as comfortable as you can here," he said.

One day Salome told Moore that there were two or three things she wanted to say. He responded that there was enough in which to say things.

But she insisted. She was quite calm, as sick people will time often be.

She explained that one reason why she had decided that she would not go South was because she thought that perhaps this very thing would happen. She almost hoped it would.

She moved more closely to him. "This is much the best way. And now I'm sure you will always think of me as I long to have you think. And if I went on living year after year, I couldn't possibly keep on being good. I'm convinced of that. And to be by your side through a long life, and to be out of step with you, and out of step with true and high things which you value, and which my mother values—"

here she broke off. "But, oh, Randolph, we've known what it is to be happy, haven't we?"

Moore did not speak. He sat silently holding her.

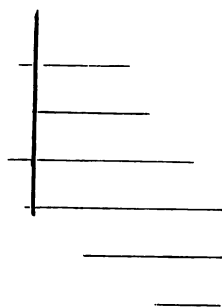
They took care of her for more than two months. In March she died.

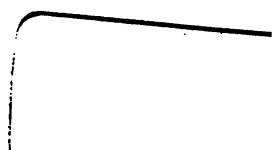
A dark, saturnine man who had not come near the cottage, sometimes—later—went to the grave.

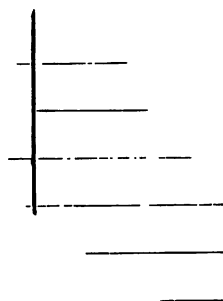
The neighbors were surprised that "Redd" took it so hard. "He didn't say anything, but he wasn't the same."

Often Moore stood by the grave, and with him was a spare woman, now seeming long past middle age. And this young man and this elderly woman knew "that their keenest joy and keenest sorrow were forever buried there."

THE END







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